

ESSAYS ON BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives

Willard Swartley, Editor

Text—Reader Series No. 1



Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary

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ESSAYS ON BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
ANABAPTIST-MENNONITE PERSPECTIVES

Editor, Willard M. Swartley

Text-Reader Series

Volume I

Institute of Mennonite Studies

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TEXT-READER SERIES

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Priority for publishing will be given to Mennonite writings and the needs of the Mennonite seminary classroom.

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ABBREVIATIONS FOR PERIODICALS AND BOOK SERIES

<u>AnBib</u>	<u>Analecta Biblica</u>
<u>CBQ</u>	<u>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</u>
<u>GBT</u>	<u>Horizons in Biblical Theology</u>
<u>Interp</u>	<u>Interpretation</u>
<u>JR</u>	<u>The Journal of Religion</u>
<u>JBL</u>	<u>Journal of Biblical Literature</u>
<u>MQR</u>	<u>The Mennonite Quarterly Review</u>
<u>NTD</u>	<u>Das Neue Testament Deutsch</u>
<u>NTS</u>	<u>New Testament Studies</u>
<u>RGG</u>	<u>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</u>
<u>SJT</u>	<u>Scottish Journal of Theology</u>
<u>ZNW</u>	<u>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</u>
<u>ZTK</u>	<u>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</u>

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PREFACE

In keeping with the purpose of this Text-Reader Series this volume of essays on biblical interpretation from Anabaptist-Mennonite perspectives seeks to make a helpful resource available to the seminary classroom. As the table of contents indicates, the essays represent four areas of investigation and contribution.

The first eight essays identify major emphases in Anabaptist biblical interpretation. One of the puzzles which these essays raise in my mind is the chicken and egg question: did the commitment to obedience precede and enable distinctive views on the relation of the Testaments, ethical Christocentrism and believers baptism or did these insights come first and then lead to obedience unto death? Or, did their view on the Spirit and the Word lead to these distinctive insights and positions? Or, did larger historical developments--the "fulness of time"-- produce this particular mix of factors?

Essays 9 and 10 focus on developments between the sixteenth century and present Mennonite experience. These essays show that the Bible continued to hold an important place in Mennonite thought and life, but also that a shift occurred in the early twentieth century, at least in MC quarters: the Bible itself, its inspiration and authority defined in specific, fundamentalistic categories, became an object of the belief system. More work needs to be done on this entire time period, especially on the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries.

The third section of essays represents current endeavors of Mennonites to evaluatively reflect on both method and authority. These essays tackle the big issues: how might Mennonites, informed by Anabaptist patterns of biblical interpretation, respond to and possibly utilize contemporary scholarship (Lind)? Is a hermeneutical bridge between the first and twentieth century really needed (Enz)? And if so, by which route, a la Janzen's description of the proposed varieties? What is the historical-critical method and what does it do--how does it work (Brunk)? What are its philosophical presuppositions and how should they be evaluated (Miller)? Further, what are its strengths and weaknesses, and in what directions is biblical scholarship currently moving (Swartley)? And finally, in view of the tendency of such methods to emphasize diversity within the canon--even apparent contradiction at the propositional level, what does the authority of Scripture as canon mean (Yoder)?

The fourth group of essays then addresses the important practical issue: what is the function of Scripture in the teaching-preaching ministries of congregational life? As one bears in mind these purposes of Scripture, discriminating perspectives emerge for evaluating issues raised in Part III.

My Afterword seeks to identify points of continuity and change in the 450 year history, focusing especially on comparisons between sixteenth century Anabaptism and contemporary trends in biblical interpretation. Some proposals for priority of emphasis are put forward for the purpose of stimulation and testing, both in the circles of this book's readers and by the congregations they serve.

The Bibliography is not complete; it calls attention to selected important articles. I made some effort to show the history of the hermeneutics discussion among the Mennonite college Bible and seminary faculties. I am grateful for these endeavors and the permission to use in this collection essays arising from these occasions. I am especially indebted to the Council of Mennonite Seminaries for papers given at the 1977 LaGrange Consultation (chs. 3, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 20) and to the Mennonite Quarterly Review, ed. John Oyer, for permission to use articles from its April 1966 issue, lectures presented originally at Bethel College in 1964 as the Menno Simon Lectures (chs. 5, 6, 7, and 8), and its October 1967 issue, papers presented at the Goshen Biblical Seminary Alumni meeting in 1966 (chs. 2 and 10). I thank the MQR also for the article (July 1967) appearing here as chapter 9, presented originally to the Mennonite Seminary in Montevideo in 1965. I express appreciation also to Direction for use of the article (from Vol. 6, No. 2, 1977) appearing here as chapter 4 (though now in revised form), to Herald Press for permission to use Lind's essay (ch. 11), published in the Guy F. Hershberger Festschrift, Kingdom, Cross and Community (1976), and to publisher H. D. Tjeenk Willink for permission to photo-produce Dyck's article as published in the J. A. Oosterbaan Festschrift, De Geest in het geding (1978).

I thank the authors whose essays have made this volume possible. Thanks go also to Charmaine Jeschke, Carol Martin, Rachel Stoltzfus and Mary Swartley for editorial assistance and proofreading, and to Carol Martin, Rachel Stoltzfus, Emilie Seitz and especially Sue Yoder for typing and related tasks in manuscript preparation.

Willard Swartley, Editor
March, 1984

PART I
INTERPRETATION OF ANABAPTIST SOURCES

1

ANABAPTIST HERMENEUTICS:
PRESUPPOSITIONS, PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

Walter Klaassen

Presuppositions of Anabaptist Hermeneutics

1. The Function of Scripture

It is assumed by Anabaptists that not only does the Bible contain the good news of salvation through Christ, but it also contains specific directions for the individual and the corporate life of those who respond to the good news. The Bible gives specific guidelines for the shape of discipleship, for the form of the church and for the relationship of the church to the world. The basic models of the believer's relationship to Christ (discipleship) and of the church as the binding and loosing community are to be found in Scripture and are to be followed and obeyed because they represent the mind of Christ.

The Reformed theologians approached the Bible in the same way but came to different conclusions because of their view of the relationship of Old and New Testaments. They appropriated models from the Old Testament as well, whereas Anabaptists insisted on the primacy of the New for the church.

2. Word and Spirit

Most Anabaptists identified the Scriptures and God's Word. If one comes to the Scriptures with an honest and searching heart, the Spirit of God will illumine the mind and remove hindrances to understanding. Thus only one who comes with the right disposition which is mainly humility, a readiness to be instructed, will truly understand the Word. No scholarship is of any avail if the humble spirit is lacking. Only the Spirit provides true discernment as human natural gifts are strengthened by God's own presence.

3. Understanding and Obedience

There is also a close connection in Anabaptism

between understanding the Scriptures and obedience to what they demand, between knowledge and discipleship (Yoder, MQR 41[Oct 1967], 307). Some Anabaptists like Hans Denck and Hans Hut never tired of saying that true knowledge of God and his will cannot be achieved simply from reading the Scriptures. Hans Denck was pointing to this in the oft-quoted sentence: "No man can know Christ unless he follows after him in life." Similarly Hans Hut argued that attaining to the truth was a process that took place in following the footsteps of Christ, not by attending the universities in Paris or Wittenberg. The readiness to obey Christ's words is prerequisite to understanding them. Thus all the sophistication of interpretive methodology will be of no avail if the reader and interpreter of Scripture is not ready to obey Christ's words in his life.

4. The Bible and the Word of God

Many Anabaptists believed that the Word of God was broader than the Bible, although the Bible is always viewed as the chief medium for the sharing of God's Word with man. The Word of God can also come directly to the believer in the heart, i.e., that God uses no immediate medium for transmitting it. The Word of God can also come through the spoken word of others, particularly preaching and admonition. Although there is not total agreement among Anabaptists on these points, these views do represent a part of the tradition. Hans Denck refused to call the Bible the Word of God lest it cut a person off from hearing the Word of God directly in the present.

Hermeneutical Principles of Anabaptism

1. Christocentrism

For all Anabaptists Christ was the centre of Scripture. All Scripture must be seen and evaluated through the spectacles of Christ and his apostles. This principle expressed itself in the movement in several ways.

a. Pilgram Marpeck. The centrality of Jesus, the man of flesh and blood, the physical man, most strongly emerges in the works of Marpeck. God reveals himself in material ways. Only through the earthly, physical Jesus can one penetrate through to the heavenly Christ. In Jesus God has imposed physical

limitations on his revelation. This Jesus now becomes the clue to understanding the Scriptures. It is not the same as Luther's "Was Christum treibet" (Whatever promotes Christ) for then Luther began to look for Christ everywhere and found him everywhere, especially in the Old Testament. The emphasis on the human physical Jesus places historical limitations on the interpretation of Scripture.

b. Swiss Brethren and Menno. Among the Swiss and in Menno Simons we find a somewhat broader and more general articulation of the principle of Christocentrism. Here we hear about "the life and doctrine of Christ and the apostles." The main principle of interpretation then is the life and teaching of Jesus and its interpretation in the rest of the New Testament. It became especially a means of handling the Old Testament. It provided a way of discriminating about what in the Old Testament could be appealed to in the age of grace. Although somewhat broader, this view still places historical limits on interpreting the Bible and virtually shuts the door on all forms of allegorical interpretation.

c. Legacy of Hans Hut. Still others emphasized especially the Cross of Christ, like Hans Hut and his followers. The suffering of the innocent one becomes the clue to understanding the Bible. There is much talk about the lamb that was slain from the beginning of the world, which meant not merely the suffering of Jesus but the suffering of the creation and Christ's suffering in his disciples. The Cross as the symbol of suffering thus becomes the key to the understanding of the whole of Scripture.

This is essentially a mystic view and also moves closer again to Luther's "Was Christum treibet." It enables a greater and wider use of the Old Testament as is natural, since the point of view came from Thomas Müntzer.

In sum then, the chief hermeneutical principle is Jesus, his life, words, and death. Whatever is in conflict with this is not God's Word for the church.

2. Relation of Old and New Testaments

Most Anabaptists took an historical-development view of the relationship of the Old Testament to the New. Jesus stood at the centre. He was a hinge, a watershed. Before him had been one kind of historical reality; after him, another kind. Before Jesus everything was in the nature of promise of things to

come; in Jesus everything was fulfillment. The Old Testament was a shadow; in Jesus came the true reality. The law was the mark of a servile covenant; in Jesus Christ grace is the mark of a covenant of free sonship. These relationships emphasize the centrality of Jesus.

What was before Jesus was real enough. To the real people of Israel God revealed real divine revelation, but it was incomplete, unfinished, suitable not to make sons but patiently to deal with servants. Where the Old Testament is superseded by the New it is no longer authoritative for Christians. It was authoritative for God's people once, but now no longer. It does retain a certain authority "outside the perfection of Christ." Thus even for the Old Testament Jesus became the interpretive principle. Whatever agreed with him was and remained God's Word; whatever contradicted him was not God's Word for the new covenant.

3. The Bible Illuminates Itself

Many passages in the Bible are obscure or even contradictory. When this is the case, that is, when the Bible is unintelligible at one point, some other part will come to the rescue and explain it. That is to say, the Bible interprets itself. This principle developed among Anabaptists out of dissatisfaction with scholastic methods of interpretation. By using this principle one did not need to resort to methods which supplied a meaning, for example, from tradition. Introducing meaning from external sources meant distorting the meaning of the text. Sufficient help for interpretation was found in the Bible itself if one searched diligently. And since the Bible was by one author, the Holy Spirit, it was proper to use one text to illumine another. The point that the Bible is basically simple and clear occurs frequently.

4. Letter and Spirit

Anabaptists were accused of both literalism and spiritualism, of a wooden insistence upon a literal following of Jesus' words, on the one hand, and of abandoning Scripture by flight into complete subjectivism, on the other hand. There is some truth to both, but it is obvious that both cannot be true of the same people at the same time.

There is no question that the letter was important to Anabaptists, for they could not afford to

have the authority of the Bible undermined again by a disregarding of its obvious demands. The charge of literalism came especially in their insistence against infant baptism, the oath, bearing of arms, and usury. Those cannot be said to be unimportant issues. Anabaptists readily recognized that in some cases one had to appeal to the general drift or intention of a larger passage in preference to the literal wording of an individual text, but they challenged the way in which it was used against them by the Reformers in a generalized appeal to faith and love (Yoder, MQR 41 [Oct 1967], 297). For faith and love in the Anabaptist understanding had specific, not general content. By obeying Jesus literally on not bearing arms, one was being loving and faithful.

The Spirit was appealed to by Anabaptists, but not, except in a few isolated cases, as a source of new revelation. They felt driven by the Spirit to be baptized, to preach, read the Scriptures to others, or go to one place or another. But the Spirit they appealed to was the Spirit who was also the author of the Scriptures and who did not contradict what he had said in his main witness.

The problem is most acutely visible in Pilgram Marpeck and there most creatively articulated and resolved. To quote William Klassen:

The letter was important but not as a dead standard by which to live; rather it was the vehicle used by the Spirit to communicate its message to him, a vehicle that would be necessary as long as man lives on the stage of history. The letter had been infused with the Spirit and had become 'a living letter in his heart.' (Covenant and Community, [Eerdmans, 1968] p. 98).

Anabaptist Hermeneutics in Practice

That this section needs to be added is indication of how closely hermeneutics was integrated with life. It was not an abstract methodology but a part of the total being of the disciple.

The Community Interprets

"It is a basic novelty in the discussion of hermeneutics to say that the text is best understood in a congregation" (Yoder, MQR 41 [Oct 1967], 301).

That is true both for today as well as for the sixteenth century. The Anabaptist insistence on community interpretation was a declaration that the academic tools of literary analysis were not enough. The text can be properly understood only when disciples are gathered together to discover what the Word has to say to their needs and concerns (Yoder, ibid). For each member of the church has something to contribute out of his own experience. It is therefore not the hierarchy as in Roman Catholicism, nor the scholar-teacher as in Protestantism who decides what the Word means in any given instance, but the gathered community under the guidance of the Spirit.

In this setting the scholar has a place in that s/he brings to the discussion knowledge of the languages and what others have said about the text. But s/he is not exempt from the congregational process of searching and finding. This process is designed to save Christians from the tyranny of the specialized knowledge and equipment of the scholar, as well as from the tyranny of individualist interpretation and of the visionary.

Epilog

I am not sure what function such a statement might serve in a twentieth century setting. The problems and methods of hermeneutics have changed so radically since the introduction of historical and literary criticism in the nineteenth century that there is hardly any resemblance between their way and the sixteenth century way of biblical interpretation. Both take the Bible seriously and that is about where the resemblance ends.

Can an essay like this be more than just a reverent nod to the ancestors, as Yoder says? Is it only the acknowledgement and articulation of an ideal we no longer attempt to practice? While the principles of Anabaptist hermeneutics may not adequately serve us today, the way in which they worked at the task may. Three points strike me as having special relevance for today:

1. The view that it is the congregation that interprets Scripture.

2. The view that the scholar is subject to the congregational process of interpretation.

3. The relationship between discipleship and epistemology.

THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE ANABAPTISTS

JOHN H. YODER

THE LIMITED VALUE OF THIS STUDY

As has always been the case in any stable society, a meeting cannot properly begin without a gesture of reverence toward the ancestors. I have therefore been called in, as one of those men assigned to the study of ancient monuments, to lead the congregation in its ritual nod to the past.¹

For a number of reasons it is of limited value to take one's orientation for a study like this from another century. Although in some ways the Anabaptists are the spiritual ancestors of contemporary Mennonites, in many other ways it is quite questionable whether the heirs really stand or wish to stand in their succession. If it were to be assumed that simply because of the accident of historical connections the position of a few men 400 years ago was to be a standard for all their progeny, this would of course mean that most other Christians would for the same reason be closed to all that they have to say—a most hopeless vision of the ecumenical effect of historical perspective.

In terms of theological and ethical substance, the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century are not really the major spiritual ancestors of Goshen College Seminary alumni. It could effectively be argued

¹ Paper presented to regional meetings of the Goshen College Biblical Seminary Alumni Association in March, April, and May, 1966. This paper was prepared without awareness of the closely related materials which appeared in *MQR* in April 1966. It is here reproduced with only minor modification and annotation, without attempting extensive cross-reference to the papers in that collection. The two introductory sections testify to the context of the original presentation, where the historical study was intimately interwoven with contemporary pastoral and denominational concerns.

that modern American Mennonites have about them more that has been derived from John Wesley or Dwight L. Moody than from Conrad Grebel, Pilgram Marpeck, or Menno. This non-Mennonite character of contemporary Mennonitism explains a fundamental warp in most current thinking about church identity and church unity. Further reason for doubt about the exemplary value of historical origins is that, whatever else we do, no one is today founding a movement. There was about the early Anabaptists a character of historical originality which cannot be found in anything which can or should happen among their progeny.

Really the only appropriate question we should ask of any past movement is what the major point was which was at stake at the time it came into being, and whether at that one point this group of Christians was more correct than their interlocutors. If we judge them to have been on the right side in that one key issue, we may next appropriately ask what light that correct insight throws on other issues which were not then central in the same way. It is however wrong to ask simply what the Anabaptists would have done, or did, about some challenge which they in fact did not have immediate reasons to face. This is a general remark concerning the limits of historical study; it will also apply, as we shall see later, to our particular topic.

Especially does this kind of caution need to be stated when the persons whose thought we are attempting to understand were themselves not highly conscious of being theological thinkers. The first Anabaptists did not have the time or the gifts to concentrate on careful logic. They were never asked to present all their thought as a coherent whole. They did not claim to be the mentors of a movement, for they began as the intellectual children of Luther and Zwingli. Those men, both of them scholars, did in a genuine sense think something through and then apply it; the same was not the case for their disciples. Even for those who came to such a degree of independence as to create a movement of their own, later called "Anabaptists," this step was not the unfolding of a new *logical* or *theological* position, but rather expressed a different concern for integrity in *practice*.

THE HERMENEUTIC QUESTION TODAY AND IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

When we today speak about "The Hermeneutic Problem," we mean to point to one of several contemporary intellectual issues.

(a) The first of these, the *old* "hermeneutic problem," has to do with the truth value of the statements and assumptions which the Bible makes concerning history and nature, especially when these

seem to contradict the reports of the secular disciplines like history, geology, biology. Is there a genuine conflict and must we, if we believe the Bible, claim that the other disciplines are wrong? Or must we learn a new way of re-interpreting the Bible so as not to have a conflict? Is there some way in which these secular sources of insight themselves contribute to our better understanding of the Bible?

The question as thus stated is only one facet, but the crucial one, of what may more broadly be characterized as "the hermeneutic problem" in all reading of history: how do we relate the reading of any document to what we know about the vast difference in intellectual life and in views of reality between its age and our own?

This question has one degree of urgency when it speaks to matters which, although present in the Bible, are not central to its concern (i.e., evolution); it adds another level of urgency when the "secular disciplines" of history or archaeology actually come into the biblical interpretation itself and suggest new understandings of what the Bible texts actually meant in their own times, or raise questions of whether their accounts can be correct.

(b) There is another kind of hermeneutic problem, currently referred to as "new," although actually it is older than the other. How shall we reinterpret the biblical message so as to fit within a world view which the scholar finds more acceptable than that of ancient times? Beginning with the fact that modern man starts all thought with himself; or, more precisely, with his "self," being aware of and accepting himself as the center of meaning, how then do we "interpret the Bible" so as to make it "meaningful for me"? Especially as this modern man has grown culturally to the point where the word "God" is no longer a meaningful word for him, what then is the Christians' message? Must we tell him that his world is wrong? Or can we interpret the Bible so as to speak also to him in a "relevant" way?

(c) Somewhere between these two questions is the continuing practice of critical study of traditional understandings of the faith, from the perspective of continued biblical research. Is the inherited doctrinal system of a given denomination, which claims to be identical with the total teaching of Scripture, really that accurate as a portrayal of what the Bible says? Does this not need to be tested again in every generation? Otherwise, how would we explain the variety of positions each of which claim to be simply identical to the biblical teaching? But if we are to test our own traditional formulae for their faithfulness to Scripture, we then need rules of interpreta-

tion by which we can criticize our own rules of interpretation. How can this be done honestly?

Another way to state our problem would be to say that we live in an age whose predominant intellectual mode is one of relativism.

(a) In our age it is impossible to avoid *cultural* relativism. We know that food, dress, and manners vary enormously from one time to another and from one place to another. For a woman to cover her head means one thing in India and another in Japan. To kill a bull means one thing in Spain and another in Chicago. What does it then mean to "believe" or to "apply" what the Bible says when we do not live in the world of the Bible?

(b) There is *linguistic* relativism. People who grow up speaking only one language can assume that to every word there corresponds a thought and to every label a reality. Thus "verbal revelation" can be for them a very solid concept. But those who have learned to live in several different language worlds soon discover the variability of the sense of reality lying behind each language. One can no longer assume that any text, especially if it has been translated from another language, as all the Bible has, most obviously must mean thus and so. In fact the whole concept that God speaks through words changes when we recognize that words are not solid units of meaning, but fluid and fuzzy products of constant cultural change.

(c) There is the psychological and *existentialistic* relativism of one side of modern culture. Man himself being the center of all of his experiences, the only meaning there is what things mean to him. The only truth is truth for him. It is then a meaningless question to ask how some ancient document has "authority" for him; all that we can ask is how much of it appeals to him, whether it "rings a bell" for him.

(d) There is the fact that *relativity* is part of our world view. There is no longer one center to the universe or to earth; any place is as good as another to start measuring or navigating. When we live in a world where there is no one center, judgments of right and wrong, normal and abnormal, seem to take on a different shape.

Now the point which needs to be made for our purposes is a negative one; it is that these questions could not really come to the surface in the sixteenth century. The conflict with other world views is completely a modern problem; others of these challenges were potentially present, and can be found behind the scenes, but the intellectual tools which we currently use for dealing with such questions were not available, and they could hardly have come to the surface in this particular form. Especially the form of this debate

which arises out of the Anglo-Saxon modernist-fundamentalist controversy is strange to our materials. The entire sixteenth century made basically the same assumptions about the nature of religious authority in revelation. Roman Catholics and Protestants differed about whether there was one source of revelation or two, but with regard to how Scripture functions as one such source they were agreed. They held to understandings of how revelation can be in a book, and of hermeneutic rules for interpreting the book, which were hardly different. Thus when it is reported at great length (quite accurately) by scholars that the Anabaptists were very biblicistic, this does not say too much. Everyone was a biblicist in the sixteenth century. Even the spiritualists and the rationalists took Bible authority for granted and used proof texts to make their points. Even when their point was the insufficiency of the letter of Scripture, they proved it with a proof text.

We should therefore not expect the sixteenth century, and especially Anabaptism within it, to throw much new light on twentieth-century discussions either of the authority of the Bible as revelation, or of its form (the "propositional" question).

When we can speak of the wide consensus of the sixteenth century on the interpretation of the Bible, this has to do not only with the reading of the text itself, but also with the total framework in which the appeal to the Bible was made in the age of the rediscovery of *sola scriptura*. The Anabaptists, and all kinds of Protestants as well, were arguing for a restoration of the purity and faithfulness which Christianity had before the "Fall of the Church." They differed only as to when the Fall of the Church had taken place. For the Anabaptists it was in the age of Constantine, for the Reformers somewhat later, so as to save the ecumenical councils. The analysis which distinguishes radically between "restoration" and "reformation," with the Anabaptists alone representing "primitivism," is overdone. After the fact, we can see a real difference in degree between the "reformation" of Luther and the "restoration" of the Anabaptists; but this was not the result primarily of a radically different strategy of reformation; it also is conditioned by the fact that the Lutherans had a chance to tell the existing church what to do and this chance was not given the radical disciples of Huldrych Zwingli. If Zwingli had gone on with the aggressive process of gradual reformation which he had begun, there is no indication that any "primitivistic" drives would have kept his younger disciples from following him.²

² Elsewhere we have indicated ("The Turning Point of the Zwinglian Reformation,"

Similarly, both the Anabaptists and the other Protestants were concerned for a renewal of morality and of piety, over against the abuses which had entered Christendom in the Middle Ages. Martin Luther tended to feel that this moral renewal would follow almost automatically from the restoration of proper preaching, whereas the Anabaptists made it a matter of congregational action. This is one of the places where the Anabaptists demonstrate a continuity with the best vision of the medieval church, and it is Luther who is taking a radical new position. But this difference between "preaching alone" and congregational concern was not a difference between Anabaptists and the rest of the Reformation; for the early reformed leaders, especially Oekolampad, Bucer, and Calvin, were all on the "free church" side with regard to this question.

If, therefore, we hope to get immediate light from the sixteenth century on the questions referred to today as "the hermeneutic problem," we are asking the wrong questions of the sixteenth century. We can get light, but must do it indirectly and without any prior assumption that the answers defined there will be immediately applicable. We cannot ask what their answers were; at the most we can observe how they went about asking their questions.

THE TWOFOLD WORD

The adversaries of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, as well as historians of our century writing critically about them, set side by side two different accusations.

On the one hand, they were and are accused of an overly great literalism in the interpretation of the Bible. This came to the surface constantly in debates about such matters as the oath and the bearing of the sword, usury, and the baptism of infants. At these points the Anabaptists would insist simply upon the words of the Scripture, and their adversaries would call them to a more "spiritual" interpretation, or to "the general sense of the text," as over against the letter. The critics of the Anabaptists would argue for the necessity of more complicated analysis of a biblical text in order to avoid taking it at its most simple meaning.

If we are to evaluate the nature of the danger of such an

MQR, April 1958) that the clear break between Zwingli and his younger disciples came not at any of the numerous times between October 1522 and December 1523 when Zwingli accepted moderation in the process of teaching reformation insights and implementing them socially, but only at the point in mid-December 1523 when Zwingli clearly turned back from an action within his own parish, to which he himself had publicly committed himself. This reconstruction of the events of October-December 1523 has been challenged (most fully by H. Hillerbrand in a review, *MQR*, October 1965, p. 310) but thus far no alternative reconstruction of the same events has been proposed which will better explain the data, of which the most significant (unmentioned in the Hillerbrand review) are the two memoranda of December 10 and 18 or 19, and Zwingli's later claim that the strategy he adopted at this point was given to him by revelation.

exaggerated literalism, we would have to say that after the first generation of Anabaptist leaders the danger was real, but not for theological reasons. The point is rather that, with the loss of the first generation of intellectual leaders, the entire movement had to rely upon the kind of leadership which could arise out of the rural congregations. It was thus inevitable that there should be a tendency to oversimplification of the real problems of interpretation. It is in this kind of context that we should not be surprised to find some simple Anabaptists saying that, now that the Bible has been translated into the language of the people, we actually need no scholars at all.

Yet these simple spokesmen of refugee Anabaptism nevertheless did not make a systematic issue of their insistence on the clarity and simplicity of every text. They did leave real room for what they called "the character of Scripture." They recognized that there could be such a thing as the general drift of a text, or the meaning which a total passage has in its context, which could conceivably be distinguished from the immediate wording of one particular verse. They, however, challenged the way in which this kind of generality was used against them by the Reformers. If we were able to examine further the particular cases with which we have to deal, the validity of their objection would be understandable. The best examples of what they had to be afraid of were the meaning of "faith" and of "love" in the theology of the official Reformation.

The most extensive documentation of this clash of hermeneutic assumptions is to be found in the recorded disputations of the 1530's.³ More briefly, an excellent sample can be seen in Heinrich Bullinger's 1531 letter, "How to Deal with Anabaptists."⁴ Here it is transparent how the concept "love" has become equivalent to "whatever serves the preservation of the unity of society," with "faith" meaning all the dogmatic deposit of the church's experiences. Thus the "rule of faith and love" as hermeneutic guide could mean the radical relativisation of *sola scriptura*.

And yet on the other side another set of accusers claim that the Anabaptists relied upon the personal possession of the Holy Spirit to the extent that the Bible was unnecessary. There do seem clearly to have been some individuals who would speak of doing what the Spirit told them to do in such a way that it seemed to the Reformers that they were affirming a special revelation. We know of no significant cases where a person fully within the Anabaptist movement

³ For Pilgram Marpeck's exchanges with Martin Bucer, cf. *ME* 3:493. The written portion of this debate fills 135 pages of Manfred Krebs and Hans Georg Rott, *Elsass I* (Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, VII, Gütersloh, 1959) pp. 395-530. For Zofingen 1532 cf. *ME* 4:1035. For Bern 1538: Jan P. Matthijssen, "The Bern Disputation of 1538," *MQR* 22 (1948):19 ff.

⁴ *MQR* 33 (1959):83ff.

used such language about actions which were not themselves commanded in Scripture, but it certainly appeared on the margins, and there must have been something about the movement itself which left some room for this.

One often finds early Anabaptists appealing directly to "the Spirit" to explain why they behave as they do. But when one looks at the specific action which they take or convictions which they hold on this ground, we find that these are all clearly biblical in origin. The Spirit is not claimed as a source of new revelation. They ascribe to the Spirit the motivation for their repentance or their requesting baptism; for their confessing sins; for their going out to preach and to baptize; for their confidence that in the future they will be guided by their Lord. Often, in fact, "the Spirit" seems to be thought of not so much as a power operating only in the present but also and at the same time as the author of Scripture; "the Spirit says" can be the preface to a direct biblical quotation. But the fact remains that this reference to the Spirit involves a level of subjective acceptance and commitment which is not characteristic of some other doctrines of Scripture.

In the face of the fact that some critics of Anabaptism complain of too much emphasis on the letter and others of too much emphasis on the Spirit, part of the explanation is of course in a difference in persons. Not all the critics were speaking of the same Anabaptists. But nevertheless there is a sense in which both kinds of accusation had a real point of contact. The way the Anabaptists themselves developed their position, which seemed so self-contradictory to their critics, made use of the phrases "Inner Word" and "Outer Word." The language is consciously borrowed from an older mystical tradition, but with a significant modification.

The point of the insistence upon the Inner Word is that a biblical text without the penetration and testing of personal appropriation is a dead letter. Hans Denck, perhaps the first Anabaptist to use this pair of terms, drew up a list of contradictions in the text of Scripture.⁵ His point in so doing was not to argue that Scripture should not be authoritative, but rather to point out that in order to

⁵ Apart from a brief paragraph each of preface and conclusion, Denck's 1526 pamphlet, "He Who Truly Loves the Truth," is a simple series of scriptural antitheses (*gegenschrifften*), such as:

- VI: "God does not repent of his gift and calling. Rom. 11 [29]
"It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: I Kings 15 [I Samuel 15:11]
- VII: I have not come to judge the world, John 12 [47]
I came into the world for Judgment, John 9 [39]
- VIII: If I testify of myself, my witness is not true, John 5 [31]
Even if I bear witness of myself, my witness is true, John 8 [14]
- XXIX: I am with you always, Matt. 28 [20]
Me ye have not always, Matt. 26 [11]

Walter Fellmann, ed., *Hans Denck, Schriften*, 2. Teil (Gütersloh, 1956), 67 ff.

reconcile seemingly contradictory understandings, there must be a deeper personal penetration of what the texts are all about. The statement "the Bible is true" is obviously not hermeneutically sufficient if its text contains statements which are mutually contradictory. It only becomes a true statement in the context of interpretation and "reception"⁶ in which varying texts are related to one another and all are understood within a larger framework. Only in this framework have they meaning, and thereby authority. Denck did not necessarily mean that the working of the Spirit which is necessary to interpret Scripture as a unity would be a kind of mysterious or mystical insight. In the case of some of the contradictions he found in the text of Scripture, a further grammatical or contextual analysis is sufficient to show that the texts do not really speak against one another. But even this linguistic analysis is part of a process of appropriation, not contained within the text itself. Thus it is understandable that the Reformers, with their strong emphasis (when arguing against the Roman Catholics) that the text of the Bible is sufficiently clear—the doctrine of "perspicuity"—and carries with it its own final authoritative interpretation, felt that the Anabaptists, with their insistence on personal appropriation through the Spirit, were opening the door to "enthusiasm."⁷

And yet on the other hand the only court of appeal is the text of Scripture. No congregation and no prophet may claim with any authority to have heard the Spirit, unless in the testing of that Spirit Scripture can be appealed to. The disciples of Melchior Hofmann in Strasbourg, themselves given to quite fantastic interpretations of biblical prophecy, still could see clearly to reject the personal visions of a David Joris, when he claimed that they should listen to him because of his visions.⁸ In their understanding of prophecy the Melchiorites were "far out," but they still believed they were interpreting the letter of Scripture. Thus it is also understandable that Heinrich Bullinger could hold against the Anabaptists primarily their literalism, that is, their insistence on letting any particular text say what it really means to say. This was reflected in the Anabaptists'

6 By "reception" as a technical term in the study of the history of laws and institutions is meant the process whereby a later cultural or legal or social system incorporates a law or a practice from an earlier system, ratifying it by that acceptance but also often changing its meaning by inserting it in the new context.

7 "Enthusiasm" in its technical sense is probably the best English equivalent for "Schwärmertum." In reaction to the sweeping polemics of the magisterial Reformation, some historians of the radical Reformation have attempted to avoid the term completely. To this writer it would seem more responsible to use it in a clearly descriptive sense, purged of evaluative overtones, to describe that particular phenomenon in which the claim to specific inner divine leading, independent of Scripture, is clearly made.

8 Friedrich Nippold, "David Joris von Delft: Sein Leben, seine Lehre und seine Secte," *Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie*, 33 (Neue Folge 27, 1863) 104-8.

suspicion of excessive reliance on the tools of rhetoric as instruments of textual analysis.

This Anabaptist understanding of the complementary relationships of the Inner Word and the Outer Word provides a possible answer to a question which theology has continued to debate since the beginning of Protestantism. In what sense is faith a condition for the correct interpretation of Scripture? If we have a fair understanding of the words of Scripture and are technically capable of understanding these words as human communication, what then does faith add? Does it add a new knowledge which we otherwise would not have received? Or has it to do only with some kind of mystical or subjective dimension, not really part of the communication of the text?

In the eighteenth century, when the Pietists argued that faith is a necessary condition for correct understanding of Scripture, they meant this as a rejection of what then was held to be "orthodoxy"; at that time, official Protestant "orthodox" belief was being taught by persons who had no necessary personal, emotional, or missionary commitment to those "truths." Pietism insisted that the theologian must be a regenerate believer.

Strikingly, today the meaning has been reversed. When today it is said by conservative Protestants that faith is a pre-condition of proper understanding, it usually means that only he who is first of all committed to a basically orthodox set of Christian ideas can be sure to find those ideas in the same shape when he reads the Bible. Thus it is that often in a seminary curriculum a course in systematic theology precedes specific biblical book studies. "Faith" is here understood not as subjective commitment but (as with Bullinger) as the acceptance of a set of right beliefs. Thus two contradictory meanings of "faith" can circulate under the same label. I would suggest that the Anabaptist understanding of the two dimensions of the Word of God might provide protection against both of these dangers.

THE RULE OF PAUL

Balthasar Hubmaier had not yet become an Anabaptist when, late in 1524, he addressed to his former Catholic colleague John Eck a challenge to debate. The key provision in his proposal for the ground rules of the disputation was drawn from I Corinthians 14:29. He placed the audience, which would gather for a disputation, completely within the framework of a congregation gathered for worship, as Paul describes the same in I Corinthians 14. He proposes that

before this gathering each party should speak his convictions, and then let the congregation decide who has spoken more nearly according to Scripture. The same basic approach to a "theology of debate" can be found in the writings of Huldrych Zwingli as well; to him we owe the designation "Rule of Paul" for I Corinthians 14:29. It was thus a common conviction in the circles where Anabaptism came into being, and continued to be upheld by them when the official Reformation leaders had abandoned it.

It is a basic novelty in the discussion of hermeneutics to say that a text is best understood in a congregation. This means that the tools of literary analysis do not suffice; that the Spirit is an interpreter of what a text is about only when Christians are gathered in readiness to hear it speak to their current needs and concerns. Hubmaier was still desirous of having scholars present to speak to matters which were of scholarly character, but only for such technical details as precise translation and reporting on other interpretations of a passage.

The first implication of this conception of the congregation listening to the Word of God is that the common man becomes a full member of the church. Now that the Bible is available in the language of the people, it is the entire congregation, and thus primarily simple people responding to the obvious meaning of the text, who will make the decision as to what God says for today. This implication of congregationalism found its most widespread realization in the Anabaptist movement, but it as well had begun with Huldrych Zwingli. One continues to find among later Anabaptists a serious suspicion of formal learning and of tools of the scholar. It seemed to them almost unavoidable that such learning would be used as a means of evading the greater meaning of Scripture.

The other necessary implication of thus placing theological authority in the hands of the congregation was that the congregation must not be bound by tradition or former creedal statements, nor by the supervision of government authority. The congregation will recognize the assistance of a teaching tradition, and learn from it as long as it is in accordance with Scripture; Balthasar Hubmaier in fact collected writings of the church fathers on topics in which he was interested. There was no denial of history; but there was a refusal to be bound by tradition.

With the Reformers, and in literal dependence upon Huldrych Zwingli, the Anabaptists placed in a central position the text of Matthew 15, in which Jesus condemns the Pharisees for having created traditions which God did not command, and in which he

threatens to pull up by the roots everything which his Father did not plant. This was used by Zwingli in his January 1523 debate against John Faber; two years later it was being used by Anabaptists against Zwingli with regard to infant baptism. This particular text became the slogan which best expressed the Anabaptists' general attitude toward all religious tradition; it has no authority counter to the teaching of Scripture, nor can it even require with authority items to which Scripture does not speak. But this attitude is quite distinct from "primitivism." It is not a position which has no interest for the intervening period between the writing of the Bible and the present, or for how things came to be as they are. Among the very earliest Anabaptists we know of more than one quasi-scholarly effort, with names and dates, to understand how it came to pass that infant baptism became the general practice of the medieval church. Balthasar Hubmaier in fact finally brought together a book out of his research in the history of the meaning and practice of baptism. Thus the Anabaptists cherished no illusions about the possibility of leaping back into the first century or of repeating in some childish way the exact patterns of the primitive church. The concern was for a faithful restoration and moving forward, not for an impossible reversal of the course of history. Even when the word "restitution" was used, this meant not a simple repetition of what had been before, but rather a positive movement forward in the history of salvation through the overcoming of apostasy, which brought the church farther along than it had been in the simplicity of the first century.

Just as the Anabaptists were quite sober about the realities of historical development, notwithstanding their biblicism, likewise there is no denial of a need for order. The congregation will have its own "umpires" to ascertain when the meeting has come to a united conviction. Yet their authority is not to deal with the truth of the text but only to keep order in the meeting.⁹

Throughout Protestant theology in the early years, in the writings of Luther and Zwingli as well as the Anabaptists, it is this authority of the local congregation to hear and understand the Word of God which limits the right of governments to place or to silence preachers. When, therefore, the Anabaptists went farther to reject the idea of government administration of the churches completely, they were simply carrying to its logical conclusion the initial Protestant concept of the discerning church.

⁹ We speak here of the hermeneutic community, in a discussion of the meaning of Scripture. Here no one is required to keep silent; even the scholar must explain himself to the simple brother. This is not to deny the place of the specific leadership of the itinerant preacher, the "teacher," and the local "shepherd."

It is peculiar to this understanding of the process of revelation that it cannot remain on the level of theory. If our theory has to do only with how the words of God were placed in writing, we can discuss that without any reference to the time and place where we stand, or to any particular text. But if the claim is that the words of God are most adequately understood in the listening congregation, this obliges us to make very strong and specific statements about our actual congregational activity. This was also a part of the earliest self-awareness of the Anabaptist movement.

In January 1523, a disputation was convened at Zürich, at which the accusations of some Roman Catholic critics against Huldrych Zwingli were to be heard in the presence of all the Church of Zürich. The effect of this meeting was a confirmation of the authorization, given to Zwingli already in 1522 by the City Council, to continue to preach as he had been doing. In order to make the case for this authority, taken upon itself by the City of Zürich, Zwingli began at that disputation, and again especially in October of the same year, by laying out an understanding of the process of testing truth within the conversation of the congregation, very similar to what we have been discussing. Zwingli, together with his disciples who were later to become Anabaptists, believed that in these two meetings of January and October 1523, the Spirit of God actually did work in a unique and historical way so as to make clear truths which had for centuries been hidden.

The classical expression of the fact that this authority in the hands of the congregation may not be limited by the state is expressed by Simon Stumpf in the October meeting itself. Similarly, as we noted before, it takes the authority away from specialized theologians or hierarchical authorities, in whom the church up until then had placed ultimate intellectual authority; not because they are learned, but because they are not the congregation.

Likewise, this understanding of the process of finding the truth in the church constituted a rejection of all kinds of visionary enthusiasm. It was in synod-like meetings of Anabaptists that the moderate leaders of the main stream of the Swiss Brethren movement dealt with visionaries and libertines. At Schleithem in early 1527 a clear position was taken against the misunderstanding of Christian liberty; at Augsburg later the same year, Hans Hut agreed to follow a sober line in his descriptions of the coming judgment. In Teufen, a small Swiss village, a group of over forty Anabaptist leaders gathered in 1529 rejected the claims of Augustine Bader to have been called to a special position in the kingdom of God.

One of the paradoxes of Reformation historiography is that Anabaptism is often seen as such a radical congregationalism that it could not deal with the problems of Christian unity on a broader scale, whereas as a matter of fact the Anabaptists were the first segment of the Reformation to establish a synodical order and practice. The state-church Reformers, who wanted to go slow enough to take the government with them so as not to destroy church order, were less—not more—able to attain what they sought. The Zwinglian Reformation had as yet held no synods and Lutheranism had sent no visitators, when the two “synods” of Schleithem (February 1527) and Augsburg (August 1527) settled the major issues endangering the unity of the movement. These synods crossed national and provincial lines, as the magisterial structures never did. The repeated report of the Schleithem document, “we have been brought to unity,” lays claim precisely to such a working of the Spirit as guarantee of the rightness of the conclusions reached.

Especially clear is this understanding of the meeting of the gathered congregation as a part of salvation history, in the cover letter which Michael Sattler wrote to accompany the seven articles adopted by the meeting at Schleithem. Here the claim to a hearing made for the Seven Articles of the Brotherly Union is based upon the fact that, in the meeting, persons who had previously been of another opinion had been led to unity “without contradiction.” This itself was the demonstration that God had been at work, and thereby also the guarantee of the adequacy of the positions taken. Thus the Anabaptists considered themselves quite clearly in the succession of the early church’s process of decision making: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

THE RULE OF CHRIST

The most concise statement of the Anabaptists’ program of reformation, and perhaps the most radical definition of the Church ever stated in one sentence, was Conrad Grebel’s appeal to Thomas Müntzer:

Go forward with the Word and establish a Christian church with the help of Christ and his rule, as we find it instituted in Matt. 18:15-18 and applied in the Epistles.¹⁰ Use determination and common prayer

¹⁰ Grebel letter to Thomas Müntzer, September 5, 1523, quoted according to the Rauschenbusch translation in George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Library of Christian Classics XXV) (Phila., 1957) p. 79. The rendering “go forward” for the Swiss-German “Zuch mit dem wort” assumes the verb to be the equivalent to the modern “ziehen” in the sense of to “move on.” This is however an image difficult to fit into the context. Heinold Fast’s modern German version renders it “be a witness” as if the verb were cognate to “zeugen.” J. C. Wenger (in an unpublished retranslation) suggests that it might mean “discipline” (züchtigen). This would make most sense in the context but is linguistically unlikely. The designation “Rule of Christ” for Matt. 18:15-18 was not an Anabaptist originality but rather common Reformation usage. Martin Luther uses it with the same meaning in his 1526 “German Mass.”

and decision according to faith and love, without command or compulsion. Then God will help thee and thy little sheep to all sincerity. . . .

It cannot be our task to unfold the full ecclesiology represented here. It stands in line with the claim made earlier¹¹ that redemptive church discipline was an issue in the birth of Anabaptism well before baptism or the church-state link were debated.¹² Here we must limit ourselves to the light which the Anabaptist concern for "binding and loosing" throws on the broader hermeneutic question.

(a) The promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit to the church (Matt. 18:19-20, John 20:22 f) is given to the church in the context of the reconciling approach to the wayward brother. Thus the mandate and the enablement to discern the will of God are not primarily a provision for scholars writing compendia or logicians texting borderline cases, but for the concrete congregation struggling with differing visions of what obedience means here and now. The context for the discernment of what Scripture says to us is not scholarly objectivity but brotherly involvement in offense and reconciliation.

(b) This is a process in which the first responsibility is borne by the individual offended (Matt. 18:15) or offending (5:23 f), and the last recourse is the whole congregation (18:17). Never can it be delegated to official disciplinarians or scholars.

(c) The issues of truth and falsehood are such that the member who rejects the fruit of this fellowship process on his behalf is no longer a member of the community. It is not assumed that there are two right answers to a given question. The community's hermeneutic authority is binding, for that time and place; at the same time it remains permanently open to review if the same process of admonition again be initiated when another brother claims new light or reports a new offense.

The church may well be and do many other things. But at the center, when we seek for that "mark" of being-church without which the other functions become hollow or without which a group of

11 Regarding the centrality of discipline for the Anabaptists, cf. the writer's review and discussion in *MQR* 31 (Jan. 1957):63 ff. For treatment of the concept of the hermeneutic community cf. Franklin H. Littell, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Group Decisions," *MQR* 34 (April 1960):75 ff. and *Concern*, No. 14 (Scottsdale, 1967).

12 Grebel's own rejection of infant baptism in the Müntzer letter already quoted was based not on speculation about what ideas or emotions an infant can experience, but on the covenant to mutual discipline. "We understand that even an adult is not to be baptized without Christ's rule of binding and loosing" (Williams, *op. cit.*, 80). Balthasar Hubmaier likewise related the baptismal pledge and the practice of discipline integrally to one another (*Concern* 14, p. 16 f., 40 f.): "But what right has one brother to use this authority on another?" "From the baptismal pledge in which a man subjects himself to the church and all her members according to the word of Christ." By the time of the Schleithem confession the concept that the ban has in the church the same function that the sword has in the world was fully developed; thus even the rejection of killing and the advocacy of religious liberty and disestablishment were derived from the vision of discipline "without command or compulsion."

people or an institution calling on the Lord is nonetheless not the Church of Jesus Christ, this mark is for Grebel the gathering to discern and to do the will of God. Such "going forward with the Word" is not only the end which Reformation seeks; it is also the means which Reformation must use.

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW

From the original Reformed point of view, there is but one covenant between God and man, beginning with Abraham, of which Christ simply provides the fulfillment. This was the argument of Zwingli against the Anabaptists. It is because baptism is the New Testament equivalent of circumcision and thereby belongs to all children born within the covenant family, that the teachings of the New Testament itself on baptism are not adequate guidance. Later in the history of Reformed theology there developed the idea of a series of varying covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses but this concept of a sequence of covenants was, in the sixteenth century, the position of the Anabaptists. Zwingli and his followers insisted that there was but one covenant above and beyond all changing times; this permitted them to retain much that the Old Testament said about the people of God—not only the membership of infants but also the place of the state.

But when the Anabaptists rejected the Old Testament as a final standard for Christian obedience, this did not mean that they paid no attention to it or denied its authority. The relationship of the New Testament to the Old is not one of rejection but of fulfillment. When Zwingli accused them of not respecting the covenant with Abraham, they responded that the promise to Abraham was a "seed," and that seed being Christ, and having come, it is in line with the promise to Abraham that we should listen to Jesus. Similarly in the classical statements of the Schleithem "Brotherly Union," Articles VI dealing with the sword and VII dealing with the oath both gave a very clear and affirmative place to the teaching of the Old Testament on these subjects. The provisions of the Old Covenant were not only authoritative then, they are also with us at present in the world, "outside the perfection of Christ," and continue to be necessary. It is only "within the perfection of Christ," in the new dispensation and in the Christian fellowship, that the fulfillment has replaced the foreshadowing.

Behind the question of the relationship of the Old Testament and the New, itself quite important, there is a still deeper one. It is the question of the relationship of God's purposes to history. Should

we assume, with Zwingli, that truth is ultimately timeless, so that there can be no changing in God's purposes from one age to the next, or do we understand God's purposes to be working themselves out through history so that a meaningful movement from the Old Testament to the New can be a fundamental part of God's plan? This is the point in Reformation theology where the issue came to the surface which more recently we label as salvation history versus Platonism, or as Hebraic thought versus Greek.

THE SPIRIT OF DISCIPLESHIP

"No man can know Christ unless he follows after him in life." This statement from Hans Denck has often been looked at as a condensation of the Anabaptist concern for discipleship and obedience. The important thing about the correlating of commitment and knowledge is, however, not the emphasis that it places upon commitment and obedience, but rather the limitations it places upon knowledge. This has clear and far-reaching implications for what it means when we say that the Bible contains the truth.¹³

In later years this topic came up again in the debate between the Orthodox and the Pietists, as the latter argued that the new birth is a prerequisite for valid theology. But if the meaning of the Bible is in the words, and if the words are clear and inspired by God, what difference can it make whether one individual reading these words has had a certain kind of spiritual experience or not? Are not the words the same in either case?

One of the outworkings of this correlation of obedience and valid knowledge is the emphasis of the Anabaptists on the real danger of unfaithful church leadership. We are not in a situation of *tabula rasa*, in which the question is how the true knowledge, by means of the words of Scripture, gets into our empty minds. We rather live in a situation where there are true and false prophets, good and evil leaders about, and an apostate church teaching untruth. So we must concentrate not on how the truth in the text gets into our open minds, but rather on the conflict between truth and falsehood, both calling for allegiance. Only he who is committed to the direction of obedience can read the truth so as to interpret it in line with the direction of God's purposes. "If a man will to do the will of my father, he shall know of the doctrine."

¹³ Irvin B. Horst confirms this with proposition V of the supplementary Theses appended to his dissertation on *Anabaptism and the English Reformation to 1558*, for his public defense March 4, 1966: "The concept of discipleship (*Nachfolge Christi*) among the Anabaptists, and to some extent among Martin Bucer and the Strasbourg reformers, has epistemological importance in connection with right thinking (*vera theologia*) and is thus more than a question of piety and ethics."

TO CONCLUDE

None of the early Anabaptists intended to do anything more than apply faithfully the fundamental *sola scriptura* of the Reformation. Nor did the Reformers themselves ever abandon that same intention. The differences between them flow from the fact that at the crucial point the Reformers abandoned their initial vision of the visible church, the hermeneutic community, and were obliged to shift the locus of infallibility to the inspired text and the technically qualified theological expert. Most of the characteristics of Anabaptist hermeneutic practice detailed above center around this issue—the integrity and obedience of the listening congregation, the committed and listening believer.

Only the Old and New Testament theme cannot be explained in this way. The origins of Anabaptist originality on this point, already visible in September of 1524, have not yet been traced. Whatever the origins, their attitude was of fundamental exegetical importance, as one of their century's few ways of focusing the historical character of revelation.

The issues to which the Anabaptists had to speak were not the same as in our day; but to these two basic issues, the hermeneutic community and the historical relationship of the Testaments, their answers have been confirmed by further theological research and by experience.

Hermeneutics and Discipleship

While the history of the church since the Reformation has been, in some sense, a history of differences in the interpretation of Scripture, hermeneutics was not a polemical issue among the major reformers. There were exceptions, of course. Luther's quarrel with Erasmus in 1524-25 about the nature of the human will, and his quarrel with Zwingli at Marburg in 1529 about eucharistic doctrine certainly involved hermeneutical concerns, but the larger problem of the magisterial reformers was that of authority – religious, social, national, political. In their preaching and prolific writing of treatises and commentaries Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin were obviously involved daily in hermeneutical issues in pastoral and scholarly contexts. Their debates with Roman Catholicism might have accented these issues except for the latter's invariable appeal to the authority of tradition. It was, in fact, the Anabaptists who brought hermeneutical issues to center stage for the reformers and whose different reading of the Scriptures led to their emphasis upon the constitutive affirmation of the love-ethic and discipleship.

It is clear that social, economic, personal, and political factors were involved in this development and that these helped to bring forth a people who read the Bible in a particular way. We think of Hans Hut and his revolutionary eschatology, of Jacob Hutter and economic communalism, of the influence of medieval mysticism upon central German Anabaptism. But there were also deep personal and group convictions which both grew out of the way the Anabaptists read the Scriptures and were the result of such reading. Why did the same times and places bring forth such different fruits – the hunters and the hunted –

and how were these developments related to hermeneutics?

It is generally assumed, for example, that the Anabaptists were of one mind with Luther in his locating of final authority in the *sola scriptura* affirmation, but a careful reading of the record shows, as will be illustrated later, that there was actually considerable difference in what these two traditions understood the term to mean in practice. It is tempting to conclude that the Anabaptists were more consistent in applying the methodology implicit in the term and that Luther's theological presuppositions detoured him, but we should not assume that the Anabaptists, as 'Biblicists' came to the Scriptures without their own significant presuppositions. The intention of this essay is to elaborate upon one of these – obedience – and its implication for biblical understanding.

In my work with sixteenth century Anabaptism I have long observed a correlation they believed to exist between obedience to the known will of God and right biblical understanding and thinking, between obedience and the experience of further revelation. I have sometimes referred to this as an epistemology of obedience, that is, that their apprehension of new truths of faith was related directly to their actual faithfulness in discipleship. The well-known statement of Hans Denck immediately comes to mind: 'No man may truly know Christ, except he follow him in life' [*mit dem Leben*].¹ Bernhard Rothmann said it even more succinctly: 'And if we, with constant diligence, earnestly do what we understand we will daily be taught further by God.'²

I must confess that this approach to knowing and understanding the will of God has found resonance within the subjectivity of my own experience of faith in which every step of obedience potentially strengthens my identity and self-understanding as part of the divine plan for myself and for his people. Among the biblical texts giving support to this view is Jesus' response to the disciples' question, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?'

He replied, 'It has been granted to you to know the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven; but to those others it has not been granted. For the man who has will be given more, till he has

¹ *Schriften. 2. Teil*. Walter Fellmann, ed. (Gütersloh, 1956) 45.

² *Restitution*, 1534. Robert Stupperich, ed. *Die Schriften Bernhard Rothmanns* (Münster, 1970) 222.

enough and to spare; and the man who has not will forfeit even what he has. That is why I speak to them in parables; for they look without seeing, and listen without hearing or understanding. There is a prophecy of Isaiah which is being fulfilled for them: "You will hear and hear, but never understand; you will look and look, but never see. For this people has grown gross at heart; their ears are dull, and their eyes are closed. Otherwise, their eyes might see, their ears hear, and their heart understand, and then they might turn again, and I would heal them."'

(Matt. 13 : 11-16, NEB)

And another text from Paul:

Therefore, my brothers, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him: a living sacrifice, dedicated and fit for his acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart. Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. *Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect.*

(Rom. 12 : 1-2, NEB; italics added)

Discussion of the hermeneutical implications of the correlation between doing and knowing is not new among Mennonites. The Menno Simons Lectures of 1964 on 'Anabaptist Interpretation of the Scriptures' constitute a significant contribution in this area,³ as do the doctoral dissertations of Henry Poettcker⁴ and William Klassen,⁵ the monograph, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in Mennonite Theology* (1967) by Myron S. Augsburger, and the 1967 article on 'The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists' by John H. Yoder.⁶ In the latter essay Yoder states:

The important thing about the correlating of commitment and knowledge is, however, not the emphasis that it places upon commitment and obedience, but rather the limitations it places upon knowledge.

³ Special issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review (MQR)*, XL (April, 1966).

⁴ Henry Poettcker, 'The Hermeneutics of Menno Simons'. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1961.

⁵ William Klassen, 'The Hermeneutics of Pilgram Marpeck'. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1960.

⁶ Yoder, *MQR* XLI (October, 1967) 307.

He further cites Irvin B. Horst as follows:

The concept of discipleship (*Nachfolge Christi*) among the Anabaptists, and to some extent among Martin Bucer and the Strasbourg reformers, has epistemological importance in connection with right thinking (*vera theologia*) and is thus more than a question of piety and ethics.⁷

For our present purposes we need to ask questions about the nature of this so-called epistemology of obedience and about its hermeneutical implications and roots. We need to be particularly concerned about the cause-effect relationship between the pre-suppositions the Anabaptists brought to the Bible and the new insights they took from it. Can obedience actually be identified as a valid hermeneutical principle applicable by all to the entire canon in all times and places, or is it only a peculiar Believers' Church way of doing biblical studies as ethics? Its central thrust is both about right biblical thinking and about the nature of revelation; how was the will of God known in Anabaptism?

THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

There was some diversity among the Anabaptists in their view of the Bible. Denck, Hut, Hans de Ries and their 'circles', for example, held that the external Word was transcended by the inner and eternal living Word, Christ, and his spirit. Their ultimate appeal was to the living Word rather than the written Word, but they did not minimize the authority of the written, nor did this view prevent them from being in general agreement with Menno, Marpeck, Rideman, and the Swiss Brethren about its central message. The Bible was the Word of God, but the Word of God was not limited to the Bible. Nevertheless, all revelation remained subject to the biblical norm. The first task of a new convert to Anabaptism was to study the Scriptures alone and in the 'hermeneutical community', to teach it to his or her children and to all who would listen, and to pray for true spiritual understanding. Many tried to memorize large sections of the Scriptures, not in order to become literalists in a negative sense but in order to really know what the call to faithfulness meant for them. One of them confessed:

⁷ Yoder, 307.

'I hope to be able to learn one hundred chapters of the Testament by heart.'⁸

All of the reformers of the sixteenth century regarded the Bible as the sole authority for faith. The Anabaptists agreed with them but differed in what this meant for hermeneutics. First, they insisted that the Bible should apply to all of life and to everyone equally. There could be no division into inner and outer kingdoms, into clergy and laity. Second, true understanding of the gospel message rested upon distinguishing between different levels of biblical authority and a conviction about the continuing nature of divine revelation. 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . .' (Heb. 1 : 1-2). The incarnation would not have been necessary if God's will could have been known perfectly under the Old Covenant. It was surely the Word of God, but imperfectly, as promise, as pointing prophetically to the divine fulfillment in him who was to come. Both covenants included law and grace, but with the New Covenant came an enabling to live the life of faith and obedience freely and joyfully. 'The servile [obedience] is Moses and produces Pharisees and scribes; the filial is Christ and makes children of God.'⁹ The unity of the two covenants is not only maintained historically, but in their common purpose of revealing the redemptive purposes of God from the beginning of time. This purpose was fulfilled in Christ, whose life and work is testified to in the New Testament.

This meant that the Old Testament was subordinate in authority to the New, and that the Sermon on the Mount was the charter of ultimate appeal. The records of the debates and trials confirm this understanding. In 1531 Hans Pfistermeyer said:

The New Testament is more perfect than the Old, and the Old was fulfilled and interpreted by Christ . . . I make a great difference between the Old and New Testament and believe that the New Covenant, which was made with us, is much more perfect than the Old that was made with the Jews.¹⁰

⁸ Quoted in J. C. Wenger, *Even Unto Death* (Richmond, 1961) 60.

⁹ J. C. Wenger, ed.-transl., 'Two Kinds of Obedience', *MQR*, XXI, (January, 1947) 20.

¹⁰ Quoted in John Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe* (Scottsdale, 1950) 355.

The 1532 debate at Zofingen stated:

We say that the Old is the shadow, and that which is in unison with the words of Christ is light. This is clearly set forth by Christ (Matt. 20 : 5) when he states the order of the Old Testament and of the world and adds, 'But it shall not be among you.'¹¹

The Bern disputation of 1538 took a similar position:

We confess that the Old Testament is a witness of Christ. We accept it in so far as Christ has not abolished it and as it is in agreement with the New, and in so far as it pertains to faith, love, and a true Christian life.¹²

The Frankental debate of 1571 said:

We believe that the New Testament surpasses the Old. So much of the Old Testament as is not irreconcilable with the doctrine of Christ, we accept . . . If anything that is necessary for salvation and a godly life was not taught by Christ and the Apostles but is contained in the Old Testament Scriptures, we desire to be shown.¹³

The conceptual context for these statements was not a neo-Marcian antinomianism but complete acceptance of the total obedience of Christ to the will of the Father. This obedience was more than paradigmatic; it made the *words* of Christ binding and authoritative for all who truly desired to belong to him. It is this conviction which moves these statements beyond ethics to hermeneutics.

It is clear that having this kind of a canon within the canon will directly affect the hermeneutical task. In the sixteenth century the major reformers did not share this interpretative principle with the Anabaptists, though they had their own canons within the canon also. For them the unity and authority of God was revealed uniformly throughout both Covenants. They agreed with Tertullian's charge that heretics are always searching the Scriptures for texts suitable to their diabolical purposes, and 'Sermon on the Mount Christians' seemed to be doing just that. Anabaptist-Mennonite hermeneutic is shaped decisively by this approach to continuing revelation and the finality of it in Christ.

¹¹ Horsch, 355.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 355-356.

THE FUNCTION OF THE SPIRIT IN INTERPRETATION

Anabaptists have often been identified as Biblicists or biblical literalists. To the extent to which this was true it may, in part, have been due to the lack of formal biblical and theological training, but even more to the deep conviction that God's will could be known directly from the Scriptures, without the aid of learned theologians. Menno Simons wrote:

You say, we are inexpert, unlearned, and know not the Scriptures. I reply: The Word is plain and needs no interpretation: namely, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . (Matt. 22 : 37, 39). Again, you shall give bread to the hungry and entertain the needy (Isa. 58 : 7) . . . All who do not understand such passages are more like irrational creatures than men, more like clods than Christians.¹⁴

Melchior Hofmann, who was himself not above spiritualizing a difficult text, wrote:

Therefore I warn all lovers of truth that they do not give themselves over to lofty arguments which are too hard for them, but that they hold themselves solely to the straightforward words of God in all simplicity.¹⁵

They believed that the Bible was written by men of faith to inspire faith, and that the primary purpose of this revelation was obedience.

When this kind of approach is pejoratively identified as biblical literalism it is usually assumed that the interpretation is simplistic, taken out of its historical and grammatical context, and applied legalistically. The Anabaptists, especially Menno, identified this kind of response as an easy attempt to get out from under the hard sayings of Jesus. The mitigating hermeneutical factor, which is usually ignored by the critics of literalism in Anabaptism, is the constant reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit, not only in Denck and the 'left wing', who were influenced by the *Theologia Deutsch* and the mystical tradition, but also in Menno, Dirk Philips, Marpeck and all the others without exception – even Jacob Hutter. Thus Menno wrote:

¹⁴ *Complete Works* (Scottdale, 1956) 214.

¹⁵ 'Ordinance of God', 1950, reprinted in George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, eds. *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia, 1957) 203.

Brethren . . . I am no Enoch, I am no Elias, I am not one who sees visions, I am no prophet who can teach and prophecy otherwise that what is written in the Word of God *and understood in the Spirit*.¹⁶

Rothmann wrote:

However, since God's kingdom does not consist in words but in power, I will never achieve the power of the knowledge of God unless God's Spirit drives me with power, teaches me, and leads me into the Scriptures.¹⁷

And Peter Rideman said: 'This knowledge, however, comes alone from the receiving of the Holy Spirit'.¹⁸

Marpeck wrote:

I find that Christ, Moses, the prophets, and apostles used the divine and biblical Scriptures in three ways. First, for teaching . . . Secondly, Scripture is used for admonition and warning to him who is already taught . . . Thirdly, there are commandments and prohibitions . . . Whoever does not use Holy Scripture with these three differences cannot with any certainty handle Holy Scripture. And especially where the Holy Spirit, the true teacher, does not precede in all knowledge of Christ, everything will be misused and wrong . . .¹⁹

There are also, of course, many references from Denck, Hut, and their 'circles'. 'The Spirit equips and arms the elect with the mind and thoughts of Christ.'²⁰ And further:

If there is a part in the whole that he cannot understand he does not despise the witness of Scripture but he searches diligently and compares them with each other. But he does not accept the Scripture before it has been interpreted for him through the anointing of the Spirit. When he does not understand he suspends his judgment and waits for God's revelation.²¹

¹⁶ *Complete Works*, 310.

¹⁷ *Restitution*, 1534, 221.

¹⁸ *Account of our Religion, Doctrine and Faith* (London, 1950) 68.

¹⁹ *Kunstbuch*. Letters of Pilgram Marpeck translated by William Klassen and Walter Klaassen. In process of publication. Manuscript, 334-36.

²⁰ Hans Denck, *Recantation*, 1527. *Schriften 2. Teil*. Walter Fellmann, ed. (Gütersloh, 1956) 106.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 63.

Hans Hut said: 'The Word must be received in him with a true heart through the Holy Spirit and become flesh in us.'²² And finally Jacob Hutter:

But the night will come when the cloud will no longer be visible. Then the Lord will no longer go before us in the pillar of cloud, but in the pillar of fire will God go before his own. That is the light and brilliance of his Holy Spirit and through God's Word . . .²³

These statements are no more than illustrations of the vast documentary evidence supporting the statement that most Anabaptists took the Scriptures very seriously and usually literally, but always relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in interpreting their meaning. It might almost be identified as pneumatic exegesis in which the emphasis falls as much upon spiritual illumination as upon historical and intellectual understanding.

It was the Spirit who helped to bring about inner understanding of the text by helping them so to identify with the biblical events and message that the time and space gaps between the first and the sixteenth century believers were completely overcome. Marpeck believed he was still living in the time of the apostles. It was this identification with the present Christ which compelled them to ask the obvious question, 'Lord, what would you have me to do?' Knowing the will of God surely meant doing it. Would an earthly father ask his children to do the impossible and then punish them for not doing it? How much less the heavenly Father. Therefore it is possible to do what he asks his children to do.

Knowing and doing became a reciprocal experience of understanding and obedience, obedience and understanding. Through the Spirit the Word became powerful, alive, and immediate. It was he who kindled the kind of love which alone made knowing possible. Lack of obedience was not only a lack of love, but actually a lack of knowledge, since it was impossible to understand the Scriptures and the living Word apart from a love for Christ and a longing to do his will. To love meant to obey. The *Sitz im Leben* cycle, which so many scholars abort

²² *Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter*, I. Lydia Müller, ed. (Leipzig, 1938) 34.

²³ 'The Fourth Epistle of Jacob Hutter', 1535, *Ibidem*, 154.

by limiting themselves to historical meanings, was completed in the practical response which the Scriptures and the Spirit combined to create.

We need to pause briefly here to return to an earlier question about Luther and his hermeneutics. Did he not, we may ask, in effect say many of these same things, and is this part of what he meant by *sola scriptura*? Yes and no. Yes, of course, in that the first meaning of *sola scriptura* was to make the Scriptures alone normative for faith (and life?), the sole authority over against the Roman Catholic authority of papacy and tradition. It was Luther who, more than Erasmus and others, restored the written Word to its rightful place in the church. Yes, in that he believed lay people could read it with profit, and yes in the sense that he believed the Holy Spirit to be necessary for correct understanding of the Gospel. No, in that he, paradoxically, feared Anabaptist reliance upon the Spirit and their literal, lay interpretation. But no, particularly, in view of his own experience of grace which, conditioned by Augustinian ontology, made justification by faith the central principle of his hermeneutic, throwing the shadow of work righteousness over every effort at holiness. Some experts in hermeneutics say that the Bible must be read theologically before it can be read morally.²⁴ This is what Luther did and the results for ethics were not constructive.

Luther and the Anabaptists came with different questions. Luther's existential search for a gracious God led him, via Augustine and the medieval synthesis, to theology and sacrament. The Anabaptist search for a biblically paradigmatic community of faith and a life style of obedience led them to the way of the cross and the ethics of absolute obedience to the written and living Word. And these questions, in turn, were historically conditioned. For Luther it was nominalism, the *Theologia Deutsch*, and papal apostasy. The Swiss Anabaptists stood in the best humanist tradition of respect for the sources and stress upon human potential, including freedom of the will; the Dutch stood more in the tradition of the *Devotio Moderna*, late medieval piety, and Sacramentarianism. The mix of these similarities and differences

²⁴ J. A. Sanders, 'Hermeneutics', *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume (Nashville, 1976) 406 (g).

was bound to bring forth different hermeneutical methods and pre-suppositions.

KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST

In the theological circle on the question of how the will of God can be known the Anabaptists would probably have insisted that an understanding of the life and work of Christ is primary. He alone knew the full will of the Father and did it perfectly. He embodied in himself the constituent fulfillment of the Old Covenant in the New. He and the Father are one; to know him meant to know the Father. But how could Christ be known? Through *Nachfolge*, said the Anabaptists. And what did this require? At least two experiences: conversion and cross-bearing. It may be noted here that Luther also placed Christ at the center of his hermeneutic. When Gospel, i.e., justification by faith, could not be found in a text his comment tended to be, 'I flee to the wounds of Christ'. The authority of a text was tested by the dictum: '*treibt es Christum oder nicht?*' Yet even if it did, Luther did not associate conversion and cross-bearing with it. His was a different Christology shaped by his Augustinian understanding of predestination and bondage of the will. This inevitably led to a different reading and understanding of the Scriptures.

Anabaptist treatises on conversion are few, but the testimonies about changed lives are many. Only those who knew Christ could 'walk in the resurrection'. Then discipleship became participation in the very nature of God through the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit, as Rideman asserts:

We believe that in the Holy Spirit we have all comfort, delight and fruitfulness and that he confirms, brings to pass, carries out and perfects all things; that he also teaches, directs, and instructs us, assures us that we are children of God, and makes us one with God, so that through his working we become incorporated into and partakers of the divine nature and character. And this his work – God be praised! – we experience within ourselves in truth and power in the renewing of our heart.²⁵

This emphasis is in keeping with that of Dirk Philips in his treatise

²⁵ *Account*, 38.

*On The New Birth*²⁶ and his statement,

therefore the law serves, or is conducive in part, to the new birth, in view of the fact that no one can be born again or spiritually quickened and no one can believe the gospel, except he first sincerely repent . . .²⁷

In his 1524 letter to Thomas Müntzer, Conrad Grebel wrote:

The Scripture describes baptism for us thus, that it signifies that, by faith and the blood of Christ, sins have been washed away for him who is baptized, changes his mind, and believes before and after; that it signifies that a man is dead and ought to be dead to sin and walks in newness of life and spirit, and that he shall certainly be saved if, according to this meaning, by inner baptism he lives his faith.²⁸

An early anonymous Anabaptist sermon states:

Except we are born anew we cannot see the Kingdom of God (John 3). There is no other birth, for whoever hears the Word of God and receives it into his heart, all which the Word teaches in his heart he is willing to do according to the will of God (1 Peter 4). If he does this, no longer doing the will of the world but the will of God, he is truly a child of God . . .²⁹

The literature on conversion and regeneration in Anabaptism as the first step to the knowledge of God is so abundant that it may suffice simply to refer to the present writer's 1973 article on 'The Life of the Spirit in Anabaptism'³⁰ and to quote with approval the 1848 statement by Max Göbel:

The essential and distinguishing characteristic of this [Anabaptist] church is its great emphasis upon the actual personal conversion and regeneration of every Christian through the Holy Spirit.³¹

We note in nearly every instance cited the correlation between the experience of conversion-regeneration and the emphasis upon doing his

²⁶ *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, X, *De geschriften van Dirk Philipsz.* F. Pijper, ed. ('s-Gravenhage, 1914) 315 vlg.

²⁷ *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, 237. Cf.: *BRN*, X, 389.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 80.

²⁹ J. C. Wenger, 'Two Early Anabaptist Tracts', *MQR*, XXII (January, 1948) 39.

³⁰ *MQR*, XLVII (October, 1973) 309-326.

³¹ *Geschichte des Christlichen Lebens* (Koblenz, 1848) 37.

will. It is stated most epigrammatically in a treatise entitled, 'Concerning the Satisfaction of Christ', probably written by Michael Sattler, in the following words: 'Why should God make known his will if he would not will that a person do it?'.³² The former prior of St. Peters did not speak these words lightly, and his fiery martyrdom was to place an indelible *imprimatur* upon them.

We have been saying that a faith commitment to God and to his Word is required if the Word is to be understood, a conviction that the biblical message is relevant and true, and that its prophesies and promises will be and are being fulfilled. It is this conviction which underlies the records of the *Martyrs Mirror* and which led Menno Simons to identify suffering as one of the marks of the true church. Christian suffering is never only *for* the sake of Christ but also always suffering *with* him, and in so doing achieving the intimacy and identification which leads to a true knowledge of the divine will. Suffering teaches patience, resignation, discipline, and that complete dependency on God which is the beginning of wisdom.

In Balthasar Hubmaier's *A Christian Instruction* of 1526-1527 Hans is asked, 'What is the nearest way by which one can go to eternal life?'. And Hans replies:

Through anguish, distress, suffering, persecution and death, for the sake of the name Christ Jesus. He himself had to suffer, and thus enter into his glory (Lk. 24). St. Paul also says: all who will live godly in Christ must endure persecution (2 Tim. 3). Where Christ is and lives, he bears his cross upon his shoulders, and gives to each Christian his own little cross to bear, and with it to follow him. We should wait for the little cross, and when it comes receive it willingly, with joy and patience, and not choose our own chips and scraps of wood in imagined spirituality, and lay them on ourselves without divine understanding.³³

Hans Hut wrote:

If a man is to come to the knowledge of the living Son of God he must await the work of God through the cross of Christ which we must carry and follow in the footsteps of Christ . . . And all

³² Edited by J. C. Wenger, *MQR* XX (October, 1946) 246ff.

³³ *The Works of Balthasar Hubmaier*. Translated by G. D. Davidson (1930) and revised by Walter Klaassen. Microfilm, p. 324.

who desire to grow in the body of Christ in which the Son of God is known . . . must also suffer with him and grow into the image of the Son of God . . .³⁴

And Leonard Schiemer added:

Paul says that you are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ if you suffer with him . . . It is true, Christ's suffering destroys sin but only if he suffers in man.³⁵

Jacob Hutter wrote:

Therefore be comforted and be of good courage, for God leads [his own] into hell and out again, he makes them sorrowful and then glad again, he gives death and also life, and after the storm he restores the sun.³⁶

And finally the words of Menno Simons:

The fearful tyranny of this blind world has always lain upon the neck of the children of God and still lies there, and as has been said, probably always will lie there. For no way leads nor can lead through the door of life other than this only rocky and thorny way of the cross . . . Forasmuch then as the eternal wisdom knows very well our poor weakness, and since earthly ease, peace, and prosperity would so much like to overthrow us . . . therefore He has appointed the cross to serve as a rod that keeps watch over His own, by which He as a faithful Father keeps His dear children in discipline and piety, rouses them, and makes them go forward . . . We know very well, dear brethren, how that this cross seems to the flesh grievous, harsh and severe . . . But since it constantly adds to the piety of the pious, turns them away from the world and the flesh, makes them revere God and His Word . . . therefore all the true children of God are prepared to love, to do the will of the Father.³⁷

If we return again to our question about how the will of God becomes known to believers, this discussion of conversion and suffering would seemingly point in the direction of pure subjectivity. The same might be said then about the earlier discussion of the function of the Holy

³⁴ *Glaubenszeugnisse*, 34. Translated by Walter Klaassen.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 52.

³⁶ Hans Fischer, *Jakob Huter: Leben, Frömmigkeit, Briefe* (Newton, 1956) 23. Translated by Walter Klaassen.

³⁷ *Complete Works*, 597, 614, 619.

Spirit, but if subjectivity is the dominant conclusion about this methodology, it has been poorly stated. What was in mind was something of what Albrecht Bengel meant when he said, 'Apply yourself wholly to the text, and apply the text wholly to yourself', with this last discussion falling into the second half of his dictum.

There are many passages in the Bible in which the will of God is announced with 'objective' clarity. We think, for example, of the Decalogue. But note how quickly command follows revelation: 'I am the Lord your God . . . You shall have no other gods before me.' The well-known passage in Micah 6 is sometimes cited as 'objective' truth, but I know of no passage that combines hearing and doing more closely: 'He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.' Or again in Deuteronomy 30 : 11ff.: 'For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you . . . it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.' Or take the case of the rich young man. In response to his question about eternal life Jesus answered, 'You know the commandments . . .', but the man was immediately moved from the cognitive level to the personal with the suggestion that he sell all and follow Jesus (Mk. 10 : 17ff.). I have been unable to find a biblical passage which states explicitly or even implicitly that it is simply enough soteriologically to know the will of God, though there may be such. It is in responding to the revelation in surrender and total discipleship that grace and peace and new insight is received.

GRACE AND REVELATION

We have not taken time in this presentation to define either of the two terms given in our title – hermeneutics and discipleship – but have assumed considerable common understandings in both fields and, particularly, also some knowledge of Anabaptism. We have also done no more than indicate in a preliminary way what we are talking about when we refer to an epistemology of obedience. In addition to using the nature of biblical authority, the function of the Holy Spirit, and Christology as categories to illustrate the issues involved, others could have been used, particularly life style issues like economics, asceticism, and discipline. While the focus for this theme arose out of sixteenth

century Anabaptism, and therefore concentrated discussion in that field, more work needs to be done in testing this thesis with the materials of biblical history.

One of the major problems for further discussion in connection with the proposed thesis of a positive correlation between practical obedience and spiritual knowledge is the nature of grace. But in this field we have been so conditioned by the classical Augustinian tradition that we find it difficult to carry on meaningful discourse without using the traditional terms of sacrament, means of grace, original sin, the fall, conversion, synergism in largely Augustinian context and meaning, which is not very helpful from a Believers' Church perspective. But the question about the relation between grace, obedience, and knowing the will of God remains. Does biblical history not show how God again and again reveals himself precisely in situations of disobedience and sin?

J. A. Oosterbaan and Alvin J. Beachy have concerned themselves particularly with the meaning of grace in Anabaptism. For Oosterbaan grace is not a soteriological term but part of God's creative love from the beginning of time. He believes this understanding dominated most sixteenth century Anabaptist thought.³⁸ Beachy stresses the ontological change which takes place in the believer as he responds to the working of God in his life through the power of the Spirit.³⁹ Both of these interpretations seem to me to be helpful and correct. Revelation is indeed received in the midst of disobedience, but for the purpose of repentance and growth in holiness. It is conditional. Marpeck and Dirk Philips, in particular, stressed the gradual restoration of the original divine nature of man through the work of the second Adam. Dirk speaks of it as deification. But the many other Anabaptists cited would agree with them that the way of the cross, discipleship, leads to that kind of intimacy with the living Christ by which his will becomes that of the disciple, not simply cognitively, but totally and increasingly, and in the process transforming him into the image of Christ. When this happens discipleship becomes not only a hermeneutical principle to uncover biblical meanings but opens up the very meaning of life itself.

³⁸ J. A. Oosterbaan, 'Grace in Dutch Mennonite Theology', in *A Legacy of Faith*, C. J. Dyck, ed. (Newton, Kansas, 1962) 69-85.

³⁹ Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop, 1977).

THE HERMENEUTICS OF OBEDIENCE
Reflections on Anabaptist Hermeneutics

Ben C. Ollenburger*

FROM THE EARLY CHURCH TO THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

From its origin the church has been confronted with the responsibility of interpreting Scripture. The problem of relating the words of Scripture to the problems of theology, apologetics and ethics was undertaken in systematic fashion already in the second century by Justin Martyr and others. The most consistent hermeneutical problem faced by the church was what to make of the literal words of Scripture. Origen dealt with this problem by distinguishing three levels of meaning, which he characterized as flesh, soul and spirit. The highest significance was given to the spiritual meaning, which was also the farthest from the literal. Cassian, followed by Augustine, arrived at a twofold system of exegesis, dividing interpretation of Scripture into literal and figurative modes. By using the figurative mode the same meaning derived from clear passages of Scripture, interpreted literally, could be derived from unclear passages which were not susceptible of literal interpretation.

The significance of the literal interpretation of Scripture was again affirmed by St. Thomas, the dominant influence of the Middle Ages. He believed that the literal meaning of a passage was to be identified with the intention of its author. Thus, for example, St. Thomas was able to recover the literal meaning of the Old Testament which was lost with Augustine, who wanted to derive normative theological value from it, but he was no longer able to use the Old Testament (in its literal sense) as a source for theology.

The medieval tradition of Scripture interpretation was mediated to Martin Luther primarily through Peter Lombard and William of Occam. Two principal characteristics of Luther's method derive

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from these men. Lombard was concerned with the literal and spiritual meanings of Scripture and concluded that, basically, the Old Testament is Letter while the New Testament is Spirit.² Occam, a nominalist, denied that figurative meanings had any concrete referent and were hence useless for theology, which must depend upon the literal interpretation of Scripture.

Among the other medieval influences on Luther none were more important than Nicholas of Lyra, who taught Luther to attend to the original languages and to the text itself, and Faber Stapulensis. Stauplensis emphasized the role of the Spirit in interpretation--as well as attention to what the original author intended to say. Faber said that the key to interpreting the Old Testament is the New. The Old Testament by itself is worth nothing for theology. Christ, speaking through his Spirit, provides the correct interpretation.³

The hermeneutics of Martin Luther can be best understood as continuing the tradition of the medieval period. Where he stands apart from this tradition is not in the matter of method, but in authority. As early as 200 years before Luther, Occam had stated that final authority must be submitted to Rome in matters of interpretation. Luther stated that even a layman may be correct in his interpretation and has the right to disagree with the Pope.

Luther claimed that Scripture is authoritative because its content is Christ. Christ is what determines Scripture as Scripture. Consequently anything, even if it is in the Bible, which does not witness to Christ is not Scripture. The Bible contains different levels distinguished by the quality of their witness to Christ.⁴

One of the ambiguities of Luther's theology is the concept of the "Word of God." On the one hand Luther spoke of Scripture as being the verbally inspired Word of God, and he certainly held to a very rigorous theory of inspiration. Yet he seemed to be not at all hesitant to point to certain errors in the Old Testament and to accept real disagreement between the Gospels. Though his language is ambiguous, it is apparent that Luther meant more by "Word of God" than merely Scripture. He spoke of Scripture as the swaddling clothes for the baby which is Christ. He spoke of the Greek and Hebrew languages as "the casket

in which we carry this jewel." Luther clearly recognized the normative value of Scripture's witness to Christ, but he recognized it as witness.

In his method of interpretation Luther followed closely the medieval practice. In addition to the influence of Lyra and Stapulensis, Luther received many of his exegetical insights from his own mentor, Johannes von Staupitz, vicar-general of the Reformed Congregation of the Hermits of St. Augustine. Particularly helpful to Luther was Staupitz' identification of Law Letter and Gospel Spirit. The significance of Staupitz' insight was that Law was not equal with the Old Testament and Gospel with the New, as was the case with Stapulensis. Rather, the central hermeneutical point is Christ. That which bears witness to Christ is Gospel, what does not is Law. Luther learned three things from Staupitz: that Law and Gospel are found throughout the Bible; that Christ is the center of interpretation; that the Spirit speaks directly to the heart of the believers.⁵

Luther never swerved from his insistence that Christ is the center of Scripture and that the Spirit is the essential guide to correct interpretation. He also insisted that the literal meaning is preferable to the allegorical, that each passage is interpreted by the Biblical message as a whole, and that faith⁶ and experience are important in interpreting Scripture.

SIXTEENTH CENTURY ANABAPTISTS

A. Points of agreement and disagreement with their contemporaries.

How then do the Anabaptists relate to the medieval and early Reformation tradition of Bible interpretation? No simple answer is possible, for the Anabaptists differ with each other. However, they generally agreed with their sixteenth century contemporaries on the following points:

1. The Bible holds a place of authority in the church.

2. The Bible is meant to be understood. The Anabaptists were in particular agreement with Luther that the Bible is understandable.

3. There are some parts of the Bible which are difficult to understand.

4. These require special techniques for understanding: allegorization (Philips and Luther),

comparison with Scriptures clearly understood (Luther), comparison with the whole biblical message (Menno and Luther), relegation to an out-of-date or inferior revelation (Marpeck).

5. With Luther, the Anabaptists emphasized that interpretation of Scripture should be undertaken in freedom from church authorities who restricted the prerogative of Scripture interpretation to themselves or to their offices. Here there was some disagreement with the older medieval traditions, but the Anabaptists were particularly close in spirit to the conciliar movement in the Catholic Church with their concept of congregational hermeneutics.

6. All parties to the debate agreed that the Bible should be obeyed. Disagreement arose with respect to the Bible's meaning and regarding the scope of its applicability in contemporary life.

We can summarize the areas of agreement between Anabaptists and their contemporaries by saying that in exegetical technique they differed very little. Both Luther and Menno find Christ in the most interesting places in the Old Testament. Both of them read the Psalms as personal confessions, as devotional literature. Like Augustine, Hofmann found it necessary to differentiate levels of Scripture. Dirk Philip's use of allegory could compare to a whole host of medieval interpreters. Hut, Denck, Schwenckfeld, Spittelmayer and Müntzer all have deep roots in the medieval tradition, through the Theologia Deutsch if not Joachim of Fiore.⁸

Thus there is a broad base of agreement between the Anabaptists and their contemporaries. In the disputations both sides knew how the Bible should be read. Yet the Anabaptists arrived at conclusions so radically different that their theological brethren thought it right to burn or drown them. Obviously there were some disagreements.

1. The most obvious point of disagreement between the Anabaptists and their contemporaries was the extent to which the Bible's authority was applicable, particularly to public life. Among the Reformers limitation of the applicability of Scripture's authority emerged in the conflict with magisterial, civil, authority. For the Anabaptists there could be "no other norm for Christian⁹ behavior and Church order" than the Word of God, leaving aside the question of the meaning of "Word of God."

However, certain "pre-understandings" guided their reading of Scripture.

2. One of the pre-understandings of the Anabaptists which separated them from their environment was their sharp distinction between the Old and New Testaments. We call this a pre-understanding because it stands as a principle of interpretation, not as a result of it. This principle also stood within the "hermeneutical circle," it was not simply drawn out of thin air. However in the concrete form that it took it was determined by the context of debate with the magisterial Reformation, and the Anabaptists' reading of Scripture was guided by it.

3. Another pre-understanding of the Anabaptists was that Jesus was to be followed. Of course this is what the New Testament says to do, so it should not be surprising. What is surprising is that the (prior) commitment of obedience to Christ is the sine qua non for understanding Scripture. Henry Poettcker says that for Menno

the prerequisites of understanding are seen to lie in the attitude of the one who comes to the Scriptures. Very briefly this attitude must be marked by obedience..., a willingness to be instructed both by the Spirit and by the brethren and a personal application in seeing the truths as they apply to everyday life.... Wrongdoing... blinds people so that they do not understand.¹⁰

That is why this essay is called "The Hermeneutics of Obedience." The Anabaptist genius lay not in any exegetical technique or hermeneutical novelty or even in any theological discoveries, but rather in the simple (and expensive) commitment to do what Jesus says. Their separation of Old Testament from New Testament grew out of this commitment and as a result of difficulties which arose when they were not separated.

4. A fourth area of disagreement was the Anabaptist insistence that anyone who has made the commitment to obedience and has the Spirit of God can read the Bible with understanding. They profoundly mistrusted the theologians with their circumventing interpretations, interpretations which avoided

obedience and did not result in improved behavior on the part of the interpreter. Sattler refers to such interpreters as scribes and pharisees.¹¹ But the Anabaptists also yielded their interpretations to community consensus. In this there was radical departure from the magisterial Reformation.

We may now consider some individual representatives of the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement.

B. Individual Anabaptists

1. Menno Simons. We begin with Menno Simons because he had the greatest influence on subsequent generations, often being the only Anabaptist whose writings were read. He is the paradigmatic Anabaptist. The first impression one receives when reading Menno is that he was a man molded by the Bible. He spoke the language of the Bible, as his writings show. The second thing that strikes one about Menno is that he spoke very little about the Bible. Even such a document as the "Foundations of Christian Doctrine" contains no section dealing with the authority of Scripture. It was not a subject he needed to address. Few, if any, of his readers doubted the authority of Scripture. It was not a subject he needed to address. Few, if any, of his readers doubted the authority of the Bible. He could expect them to go to Scripture, as did he, to solve the matter at hand--to learn to "walk as Christ walked." For him, belief in the Word and obedience to the demands of the Word amount to the same thing. Hence, where there is disobedience there is no true belief. Where there is obedience there is understanding.

Knowing the Bible comes from taking the Bible not literally, but seriously--seriously enough to build its truth into the very structure of human life and relationships.¹²

Yet Menno did remain, usually, with the literal sense of the text (not to be confused with what we would call the historical sense of the text), and he believed that its meaning is plain. Some of his contemporaries thought that he stuck too closely to the text. Men such as Franck urged the freedom of the Spirit in interpretation, while Dirk Philips employed some fairly wild allegories to explain the text. But by and large Menno remained a literalist. He took the

words of the text at what he considered to be their face value, urging obedience to the plain meaning.

Menno did not, however, neglect the Holy Spirit in the matter of interpreting Scripture, speaking of "what is written in the Word of God and understood in the Spirit."¹³ The Spirit is active through the Word and thus prevents the text from becoming a dead letter. But the Spirit is fundamentally connected with the body, the church. It is in the church, the gathered community of Jesus-followers, that understanding occurs through the work of the Spirit.¹⁴

It is often emphasized that Menno employed a Christocentric hermeneutical method. If an interpretation corresponds to the teaching of Christ, then it is acceptable. Menno says

All Scripture both of the Old and New Testament rightly explained according to the intent of Christ Jesus and His holy apostles is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 2 Timothy 3:16. But whatever is taught contrary to the Spirit and doctrine of Jesus is accursed of God, Galatians 1.¹⁵

Menno's theology on this point is really quite simple. Any teaching, interpretation, or even Word of Scripture which is contrary to "the intention of Jesus Christ" is false. But here Menno was involved in a hermeneutical circle. The logic of his claim is that after we know "the intention of Jesus Christ" we may proceed to interpret the entire Bible. However we would assume that the Bible would have to be interpreted before one could determine "the intention of Jesus Christ." Here Menno is working from another "pre-understanding," like that which makes obedience a condition of understanding. He comes to the texts of Scripture guided by his picture of a pattern of life given concrete embodiment in Jesus Christ and in the believers. Interpretation may not yield results which contradict this embodied pattern.

While Menno held that the Bible is a "unity" of Old and New Testaments, his commitment to follow Christ led him (and the other Anabaptists except Müntzer) to follow the New Testament rather than the Old. For Menno Scripture is an organic unity in that

"all the Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments, on every hand point us to Christ Jesus that we are to follow Him." It is Christ who constitutes the unity of Scripture. Therefore the Old Testament has no validity apart from the New. The Old Testament is but a figure of the New. What was valid in the Old Testament is not valid in the New. Standards of conduct for the Old Testament "saints" are sub-standard for the New Testament saints. The New Testament takes precedence over the Old where matters of ethics or morals are concerned. Menno undertakes no fancy tricks to try to impose a material unity on Scripture; he is content to let the Testaments lie with the New over the Old. Granted that Moses authorized the oath, Jesus forbade it. Jesus₁₆ is the completion and the illumination of Moses.

It is sometimes pointed to with pride that the Anabaptists, and Menno in particular, were the only Reformation group to show serious concern for context in hermeneutics. It is true that Menno encouraged a respect for context, but this refers to literary context, not historical--he objects to reading one verse without reading the verses which come before. Yet Menno read the Bible devotionally, finding Christ throughout the Old Testament. And he read it as a guide to life, with little or no concern for historical setting.¹⁷ To find fault with that would be impudent. But to imply that Menno practiced historical criticism is rather silly. He read the Bible much as did the medievals who were his contemporaries.

Menno also comes in for praise because he happens to agree with the "Menno-"nite doctrine of progressive revelation. I seriously doubt whether this can be substantiated. Granted that Menno makes clear a distinction between Old and New Testaments, can this be called progressive revelation?¹⁸ It should rather be said that Menno recognized the eschatological significance of Jesus and the importance that this has for understanding the Old and the New Testaments. Often the Anabaptists, and their followers, have forgotten this and allowed the New Testament to become law. As has been pointed out, the Anabaptists emphasis on the decisiveness of Jesus' life for interpreting Scripture subordinates the New Testament,¹⁹ as well as the Old, to the intention of Christ. Jesus, the decisive act of God in

history, is to be followed above the Old Testament--and the New. Menno recognized this in saying that "the intention of Christ" is the central exegetical principle. He gives no evidence of recognizing a gradual increase in the "level of revelation" from Adam to Christ. Progressive revelation is a Mennonite dogma which should be rejected. It has little support from Menno and less from the Bible.

2. The Spiritualists. Within the Anabaptist movement, broadly defined, there was a genuinely mystical or spiritualistic tradition with roots that went far back into medieval Christianity.

One of the most problematic of the spiritualists was Thomas Müntzer--a problem for all sympathetic interpreters of Anabaptism, as well as a particular problem for the Anabaptists themselves and for Luther. Unable to live with the church/world tension with which the church has always to live, Müntzer felt called by God to institute the kingdom. His theology had to account for this call and his hermeneutics had to be able to support his conviction that he was a new Daniel come to wage an Old Testament-style Holy War. Müntzer's program could not be supported through an interpretation of the words of the biblical text, particularly the New Testament. Therefore, he turned to a spiritualistic theology and a heavy concentration on the Old Testament.

He held that the authority to preach (and thus to interpret Scripture) should belong to those receiving direct revelation from God, not the "Pfaffen und Affen" of the counterfeit church.²⁰ Consequently, Müntzer was sharply critical of those who ignored the Inner Word, concentrating solely on the Other (i.e., the text of Scripture). In a letter to Melanchthon Müntzer says:

That error of yours, dearest friend, comes totally from ignorance of the living word. Look at the Scriptures..."Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word which comes from the mouth of God." Behold that the word proceeds from the mouth of God and not from books. A witness to the true word does indeed come from books. But if God's word does not arise in the heart, the word of man

damns the deceitful scribes, who have stolen the holy oracles (Jer. 23:30).²¹

If Müntzer is properly called an Anabaptist he was the only one of that number who gave full validity to the Old Testament. It is not hard to see why those Anabaptists who succeeded Müntzer found it necessary to move the Old Testament to a secondary status in questions of ethics and morality. They were forced to find a way to read the Bible which would not condone the way of Müntzer.

Hardly a Müntzer, Hans Denck was nonetheless a spiritualist. He followed Müntzer only in the emphasis on an Inner/Outer Word distinction, not in the necessity to impose the kingdom of God forcibly on the nation or in the emphasis on the Old Testament.

For Denck the scriptural text is very important as a witness. Denck claimed that Scripture is a very human production which speaks to humans. It is a "lamp which illuminates the darkness."²² But one needs more than Scripture to eradicate the darkness. This requires the inner experience of Christ.

By nature I can never believe the Scriptures. But that within me, which is not mine, say I but that which drives me without my will or consent..., this drives me to read the Scriptures for the sake of testimony. Therefore I read the Scriptures and find in part evidences here which mightily bear testimony to that within me which drives me. This is Christ, to whom the Scriptures give testimony, that he is the Son of the Most High.²³

The authority of the Scripture is "contingent upon its confirmation and clarification of what is experienced within."²⁴

Denck's emphasis on the Spirit in interpretation is not what characterized him as an Anabaptist. What did was his conviction that the absolute prerequisite to reading the Bible with understanding is obedience. Only one who follows Christ can know him. Thus Lutheran exegesis is not to be trusted because it is done by men who do not follow Jesus. It is only through the hermeneutics of obedience that the Scripture is understood, and bears witness to the Truth.

How little the texts of Scripture by themselves correspond to the Truth is evidenced by the Gegenschriften which Denck composed, illustrating

passages of Scripture which contradict each other (e.g. Rom. 11:34a/Eph. 1:9a; Wisd. 1:13/Sir. 39.29a). The obedient community is in a position, however, to understand the Truth which is witnessed to by Scripture. Denck held that all of us have a "Logos" which is ²⁵in us but not of us, which the Bible cannot give us. It is this Logos which makes possible communication from God, communication which happens in the act of obedience.

Denck was able thus to stand outside of the hermeneutical circle from which Menno worked. Menno depended on "the intention of Christ" for true interpretation. Of course, the intention of Christ is derived through interpretation. Denck located the authority of interpretation outside the text, in the mouth of God. Both start from the presupposition that Jesus is to be followed and his Word obeyed, and that understanding can happen only under these conditions.

If the Anabaptist reading of Scripture can best be labeled the hermeneutics of obedience, then Hans Hut narrowed the focus by illustrating a hermeneutics of suffering. Here Hut followed Denck very closely in emphasizing the necessity of participation in the suffering of Christ's body for a true knowledge of him. Through Gelassenheit (resignation, abandonment) before God the believer experiences the cross of Christ, the experience which opens the Word of God to the follower. Hut's basic agreement with Denck is illustrated by the following passage:

Each person must suffer every article (of faith) within, for there is no other way to come to the knowledge of the highest good. The Word must be conceived within us, with a pure heart and through the Holy Spirit, and thus become flesh within us. This happens through great fear and trembling....²⁶

With Hut, as with Denck, authority is not primarily located within Scripture. Communication with God is "unmittelbar." Along with this there is, however, an individualism which cannot be checked by reference to the text. With Menno's approach there is always the safeguard against extravagant or subjective interpretation, because the community deals with the texts. For Denck and Hut authority rests within the individual and is (theoretically) unchecked by the community on the basis of the texts.

Caspar Schwenckfeld stands in the same tradition as Hut and Denck. His principal distinction from Denck was in his insistence that the Inner Word is the possession of believers, not of people in general.²⁷ Like Hut and Denck, Schwenckfeld emphasized (1) the necessity of the Spirit in interpretation, (2) the supremacy of the Word (Christ) over Scripture, and (3) the requirement of commitment for true interpretation. Schwenckfeld was particularly adamant in separating the Word of God from the text of the Bible. He says that when the text is emphasized

the first Word of God, Jesus Christ, is not revered. He is thrust out of his place and his office is darkened. In the same manner, the true worth of Holy Scripture...is for the most part destroyed. I say that in this sense men make an idol out of the outer words and give them forth as the self same powerful Word of God.²⁸

Like most things about Melchior Hofmann, his ideas about hermeneutics were different. Yet he made some unique contributions. He provided a transition from the "mystical" distinction between the Inner and Outer Word by applying it to Old/New Covenant. Like Denck, Hut, Schwenckfeld, and of course, Müntzer, Hofmann divided history into ages. This is the age of the Spirit and of the New Covenant. Only those who have the Spirit can properly interpret the Word.

Hofmann is well known for his principle of the "cloven hoof." This idea was used to preserve the unity of Scripture (in response to the Gegenschriften of Denck?). The cloven hoof principle recognizes the higher spiritual unity which brings together apparently contradictory Scriptures. To be gifted in cloven hoof interpretation requires a special dispensation from God:

All the words of God are righteous and true to those who have received the right knowledge of God and the Key of David. The cloven hoof and the horns carry the true apostolic prophecy. The Scriptures are not open to everybody; not everyone can untie the strings and open the knots,²⁹ except alone to whom God gives this ability.

Hofmann should also be noted for introducing a kind of typological interpretation which is quite modern in

appearance, wherein paradigmatic events are linked along the lines of salvation history.³⁰

3. Michael Sattler and Pilgram Marpeck. Sattler's position on the Testaments was brought out most clearly in the tract, "On Two Kinds of Obedience."³¹ The purpose of this tract was to contrast a legalistic kind of obedience to true Christian discipleship. The former is servile, the latter is filial. Servile (legalistic) obedience is Moses, filial is Christ. Thus the Old Testament is characterized as Law, the New Testament as Gospel.

It is quite clear in reading this tract that what Sattler was contrasting was Old and New, but not necessarily Old and New Testaments. In other words there was not a complete identification between Old Covenant (or Dispensation) and Old Testament, or New Covenant (Dispensation) and New Testament. This is, of course, not unique to Sattler. It is quite clear in Conrad Grebel as well, as Gottfried Gerner has shown.³² Sattler spoke nowhere of a progress in revelation. He spoke only of a qualitative difference between Old and New. The point of this is that Sattler was writing about obedience and faith, not about hermeneutics. It is doubtful whether the distinction of Old from New had any precise hermeneutical function. If the hard and fast Old/New distinction were carried into the use of Scripture there could be no acceptance of the Old Testament, since Sattler says specifically that the Old "administers death." Yet Sattler does employ the Old Testament for a specifically edificational function.³³

Marpeck wrote a great deal on hermeneutics.³⁴ His distinctive contribution was the complete separation of the Old from the New Testament. Again, the principal distinction made by Marpeck was dispensational, but this carried over into Scripture in a more explicit way than in Sattler. Marpeck saw the Old Testament as promise and the New Testament as fulfillment and came close to saying that the Old Testament had been annulled. Marpeck also conceived of the Old Testament in strictly legalistic terms.³⁵ In other words, Marpeck took the nascent theology of the Anabaptists and drove it to (one of) its conclusion(s).

To counter the arguments of the Reformers against the ethics of the Anabaptists Marpeck could either

attenuate the authority of the Old Testament or show that it did not support the Reformers in their claims. No Anabaptist of the sixteenth century was able to do the latter. Thus they and Marpeck were forced to do the former. He could use the Old Testament "when the occasion demanded."³⁶ but if the concern was ethical rather than devotional (as was the case in the disputes between Reformer and Anabaptist), Marpeck had to drop the Old Testament. It was the only available strategy.³⁷

ASSESSMENT

For the Anabaptists, Jesus Christ ceased to be, as he was for Luther, a forensic act of justification. The Anabaptists viewed Christ as one to be imitated as a judge of ethics, and as standing in judgment over the ethics of the old eon. Christ is a person to be obeyed. Knowledge of Christ comes in walking with him, and only then can one understand what is written about him. A large part of "interpreting" the Bible is imitating it. Therefore they allowed it to shape the way they spoke and to shape the way they lived, following Christ to suffering and death. But they spoke of following Jesus in a strange way, as if they knew him apart from the texts of the Gospels--as those who had met him in life and who, therefore, looked to the Scriptures for guidance.

The Anabaptists grew out of the Middle Ages and used its methods. Sometimes they allegorized, sometimes they were literalists. Sometimes they were mystic-spiritual, but always they used the hermeneutical methods at hand to support the central thesis: Nachfolge Christi. They recognized that the movement is from knowledge of Christ to the understanding of Scripture.³⁸ The effect of this was to value Christ's Word or his Spirit more highly than the texts themselves. It cannot be stressed too highly that while the Anabaptists were not necessarily spiritualistic they saw regeneration within the community as the sine qua non of discipleship and scriptural understanding.

The only time hermeneutics entered into the debate was when the Reformers would offer an approach to Scripture which undercut Anabaptist ethical commitments. The other Reformers consistently used the Old Testament to destroy the Anabaptists' arguments. Because the Anabaptists had no way to keep

their commitment to Christ and the Old Testament, they used a variety of hermeneutical procedures to lower the force of the Old Testament, making the New normative over the Old. This has nothing to do with scientific exegesis or progressive revelation. It was a tactic which was necessary, which worked, and which they could justify.

Anabaptist hermeneutics did not focus on methods and twentieth century Christians do not become "Anabaptists" by canonizing sixteenth century methods. We are not Anabaptists because we believe in progressive revelation or because we value the New Testament over the Old. The Anabaptists could not interpret the Old Testament in such a way that it authorized their claims made by appeal to the example of Christ. Hence they did what they had to do. We are in a different position and our faithfulness to them does not depend on taking stands necessitated by medieval methods and pre-critical understanding. Our task should be to show not that the Reformers did not rightly divide the Old Testament from the New, but that they have not rightly read the Old Testament.

Anabaptist hermeneutics is the hermeneutics of obedience. This is not very complex. It means simply that the church must abandon any structures, doctrines or methods which impede obedience. It means that the congregations must enter into "committed conversations," or "congregational hermeneutics," or, as we used to call it, "Bible study and prayer." We must read the Bible as regenerated, obedient people, followers of Christ first and foremost. We must use whatever methods are appropriate, and this means utilizing the skills and training of those who know the ancient languages and historical-critical methods. And we must also utilize the skills and wisdom of those who do not. But "methods" only tell us what the text says and what it might mean. It is the task of the congregation, not the priest or the scholar, to discern the shape of the kingdom and the pattern of obedience as we together heed Christ's call.

NOTES

1. De Principiis, Origin, 4.11.11
2. Gerhard Ebeling, Luther: An Introduction to His Thought, trans. by R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 94.
3. James S. Preus, From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 138.
4. Brian Gerrish, "Biblical Authority and Continental Reformation," SJT 10 (1957), 343.
5. David Steinmetz, Misericordia Dei (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 173-77.
6. Gerrish, p. 346.
7. George H. Williams, The Radical Reformation (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), pp. 328f, 282.
8. See Steven E. Ozment, Mysticism and Dissent: Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century (New Haven: Yale, 1973); and Abraham Friesen, "Thomas Müntzer and the Old Testament," MQR 47 (1973), 5-19.
9. John Howard Yoder, "The Prophetic Dissent of the Anabaptists," in The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, ed. by Guy Hersberger (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1957), p. 96; and cf. Clarence Bauman, Gewaltlosigkeit im Taufertum, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, III (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 148-49.
10. Henry Poettcker, "Menno Simons' Encounter with the Bible," MQR 40 (1966), 115.
11. John Howard Yoder, The Legacy of Michael Sattler. Classics of the Radical Reformation, ed. C. J. Dyck (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 122, 124.
12. Russell L. Mast, "Menno Simons and the Scriptures," No Other Foundation: Commemorative Essays on Menno Simons (North Newton: Bethel College, 1967), p. 40.
13. Menno Simons, Complete Writings, ed. by J. C. Wenger (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1956), p. 310.
14. Franklin Littell, A Tribute to Menno Simons (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1961), p. 55.
15. Simons, p. 312; cf. Peter Ridemann, Account of our Religion, Doctrine and Faith (Rifton, New York: Plough Publishing House, 1970), p. 198.
16. Cf. Simons, pp. 749, 42, 520, 603, 964.
17. Henry Poettcker, "Menno's View of the Bible." A Legacy of Faith, ed. C. J. Dyck (North Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1961), p. 36.

18. J. C. Wenger, "The Theology of Pilgram Marpeck," MQR 12 (1938), 207.
19. Gottfried Gerner, "Folgerungen aus dem täuferischen Gebrauch der Heiligen Schrift," Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter n. s. 26 (1974), p. 30.
20. Hans-Jürgen Goertz, Innere und äussere Ordnung in der Theologie Thomas Müntzers. Studies in the History of Christian Thought, II (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), p. 50.
21. Ozment, p. 70.
22. A. J. Klassen, "The Bible in the Mennonite Brethren Church," Direction 2 (1973), p. 39.
23. Ozment, p. 122.
24. Ibid., p. 121.
25. Alvin J. Beachy, The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation; Bibliotheca Humanistica & Reformata XVII (Nieukoop: B. De Graaf, 1977), p. 134.
26. Rollin Stely Armour, Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study, (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1966), p. 80.
27. Beachy, p. 136.
28. Ibid., p. 139.
29. C. J. Dyck, "Hans de Ries: Churchman and Theologian" (PhD Diss.: University of Chicago, 1962), p. 51; cf. Armour, p. 103.
30. Armour, p. 111.
31. Yoder, Sattler, pp. 121-25.
32. Gerner, pp. 25-31.
33. Yoder, Sattler, p. 128.
34. William Klassen, Covenant and Community, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968).
35. Wenger, p. 238.
36. William Klassen, "Anabaptist Studies," Concern 18 (1971), p.86.
37. Armour, p. 114.
38. Bauman, pp. 136, 168.

MENNO SIMONS' ENCOUNTER WITH THE BIBLE

HENRY POETTCKER

SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE

Menno's experience with the Scriptures when he went through his soul-shaking struggles brought on by the questions related to the Roman Catholic interpretation of the Lord's Supper and baptism left an indelible impression upon him. Ever afterward he found it impossible to dissociate himself from the source which had answered his questions and through which he had met the living Word of God, Jesus Christ. No longer did he ask what the Church Fathers had said on an issue; now it was a question of what the Scriptures said. He had found a new authority.¹

Following upon the new insights which he received he was confronted with the problem of integrating them into his life—his role as a Catholic priest, his parish ministry, his theological position, his relationship to the whole reform movement. Although he tried to evade the issue and carry on a carefree life as before, his situation became unbearable. He was so conscience-smitten because of his own sheltered existence in contrast to those who gave their very lives for what to him seemed a wrong cause that he could no longer endure it. Amid sighing and tears he came to God in prayer, begging for mercy and forgiveness and asking for the courage to preach the "exalted name and holy Word in purity" to the end that God's truth and glory might be made known. That prayer was answered, first in that he was able to preach boldly against the evil both of the Catholic Church and the perverted Münsterites, and secondly in that some months thereafter he was able to renounce all and "willingly submit to distress and poverty under the heavy cross of Christ."

Out of this experience came Menno's specific attitude of devotion and obedience, an attitude that touched both the interpretation and the application of the Scriptures. Where this obedience to Christ was lacking, Menno would not vouch for the validity of an interpretation. In this own life he evinced an unrelenting vigilance that all his endeavors might bear the right fruits, as in obedience to his Lord he sought to preach the saving gospel of grace.

Menno's stance before God was one of fear and trembling. Of him he implored wisdom to understand and to evaluate the Scriptures correctly.² Disobedience meant error, while obedience was the

¹ Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. by L. Verduin (Scottsdale, 1956) 668 ff. (hereafter, *CW*). For a full discussion of Menno and authority, see *A Legacy of Faith*, ed. C. J. Dyck (Newton, 1962) 31-54.

² *CW*, 201, 305, 425 f.

enabling factor that would make for understanding and knowledge.

The conviction that Hebrews 1:1 meant just what it said with its statement that God had now spoken decisively in Jesus Christ led Menno to place the New Testament above the Old. Because God's purpose saw its culmination in the eternal Son who became the Redeemer of men, Menno said that Christ must be made central in every undertaking. Therefore all writing and preaching must be nothing other than Jesus Christ. If he, Menno, did not follow the testimony of Christ, all he did was useless. Even if he had visions and inspirations, these must be conformable to the Word and Spirit of Christ; otherwise they would be mere imaginations.³

Approaching the Scriptures with such convictions would necessarily imply a particular perspective from which to view its content. In some respects Menno approached Luther with his *was Christum treibet*, and like Luther Menno also found Christ in most unexpected places in the Old Testament. However, when he insisted that everything be seen and interpreted in terms of Christ, he wanted it clearly understood that Christ, not the Old Testament, was normative for the Christian. This was so definite with him that he did not doubt that "the merciful Father will keep me in his Word so that I shall write or speak nothing but that which I can prove by Moses, the Prophets, the evangelists and other apostolic Scriptures and doctrines, *explained in the true sense, Spirit and intent of Christ.*" Following through with this particular perspective, Menno knew himself taught by the Spirit of God and drawn by the Father. Yet he was ever ready to caution that interpretations be weighed "with the Spirit, Word, and ordinance of the Lord."⁴

To bring Menno's view of the Scriptures into sharper focus, it will be necessary to speak to a number of specific issues. One of these is the problem of understanding. The consideration of this question is most relevant since current discussion of hermeneutics centers directly in this area.⁵

THE QUESTION OF UNDERSTANDING

While all the Reformers began with the same formal principle, *sola scriptura*, it was obvious immediately that their interpretations varied considerably. The reason lay in their different conception or understanding. Menno encountered this problem from two directions. On the one hand he was convinced that many had failed to

³ *Ibid.*, 310, 311.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 310, 158. Italics are the author's.

⁵ I refer, e.g., to the essay by Amos N. Wilder in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, ed. W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder (New York, 1962).

understand the Scriptures (seen in the evil conditions of the time brought on by man's disobedience), while, on the other hand, when he spoke and wrote to correct and to instruct, he himself was misunderstood.

In the first place we are led to ask about the objectives of understanding. For the scholastic men of the pre-Reformation period the objective of understanding was purely theological. Their endeavor was to find the necessary basis for the theological statements espoused, and hence the Bible for them was the infallible theological text-book. Luther was fully acquainted with this position, and his earliest writings are a rebellion against it. For him as for the other Reformers, including Menno, the Bible was not to be read to see what it would say by way of correction for dogmatics. They saw as the objectives of understanding the discovery of saving truth. Luther made a great discovery when he suddenly realized that the Scriptures teach that God meets men and imparts justification to them. The basic difference between the Schoolmen and the Reformers was evident: with the former the God-man relationship was seen in terms of a "servant-payment" relationship, while with the latter it was a "child-grace" relationship.⁶ Since Menno's religious experience placed him very close to Luther, there was nothing he desired more than that others might also discover saving truth. The Scriptures set forth man's sin and God's grace, and Christ and his apostles teach God's eternal truth which leads to eternal life.

If one raises the question: how does one receive the truth? one is brought to a consideration of the prerequisites of understanding. Objectively one sees in Menno the strong soteriological aspect of revelation. God wants to be known to men, and therefore men are made so that they can understand God. God approaches us in Christ; men can understand what God has to communicate to them. Otherwise there would be no purpose in Bible study and preaching. One of the prerequisites then is Bible study. To get at the Bible's message one must study its text. Menno holds that the Word is plain, yet every person is to observe carefully what is contained therein. Prior to taking up his ministry to the scattered sheep Menno spent almost a year in Bible study. He says little about the way in which he went about that study. But that he learned to know the text of the Bible very thoroughly becomes evident from the profuse citations which mark all his writings.

It was Luther who helped Menno to see that it was the message

⁶ F. J. Preuss, *Die Entwicklung des Schriftprinzips bei Luther bis zur Leipziger Disputation* (Leipzig, 1901) 22.

of the Bible rather than the language in which it was written that was important; this emphasis, however, did not minimize the importance of the text. Menno nowhere indicates that he preferred one language to another. He used a number of different Bibles in his study (Latin, German, Dutch, Greek), the Dutch being used most—at least in his writings this is the case. He was writing for the common people. Latin citations are found scattered throughout his writings, something which one would expect since Menno had received his initial theological training in that language.⁷ Unlike the Reformers, Menno did not speak to the matter of distinguishing between the copies of Scripture made from the original (*apographa*) and the translations.⁸ He did have occasion to refer to different renderings when making comparison among several translations, and his writings show that he took the study of the text very seriously.

From the subjective standpoint, the prerequisites of understanding are seen to lie in the attitude of the one who comes to the Scriptures. Very briefly this attitude must be marked by obedience (willingness to submit to the cross), a willingness to be instructed both by the Spirit and by the brethren and a personal application in seeing the truths as they apply to everyday life. Education was not a prerequisite for Menno, and this because so much of his opposition came from the “learned ones.” But it was not so much the education as it was the disobedience which marked their lives, that plagued Menno.⁹ Here there was a decided carry-over to true exegesis and evangelism. Because the Word is not a neutral fact, but a living reality, it opens itself to the believer and closes itself to the evildoer. It becomes a veritable trap, for the sinner is prompted to find in the Bible the justification for his sinfulness (as when the learned ones find passages to justify their worldliness, insisting that people are to heed them even though they have their faults, just as Jesus told the people of his day to heed the words of the Pharisees, but not to follow their example).¹⁰ Wrong-doing therefore blinds people so that they do not understand. Menno makes a distinction here: sinfulness brings this about, occasional sins do not. And here it is evident that with Menno it is not the intellect but man’s heart that enables man to understand the Scriptures. One does not need formal education. This position is seen to make sense only if the positive principle is adhered to that through the heart the Bible is understood. Menno distinguishes rightly between volition and the heart. He does not say

⁷ Menno said on one occasion that he was not qualified to write in Latin, *CW*, 229.

⁸ J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of the Scripture; a Study of the Reformation and Post-Reformation Understanding of the Bible* (London, 1957) 88 f.

⁹ *CW*, 628, 790.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

that moral and spiritual perfection are necessary to understanding, but the new birth is. Menno follows Luther here. The Catholic opponents argued on the ancient theory of the mental faculties, of which volition is one, and they would say that it is the intellect which must interpret the Bible. Both Luther and Menno insisted that it is the heart, the self, that interprets the Bible. One must have the quality of heart rather than the mind or mere energy of the will.¹¹ Both Luther and Menno were skeptical of an independent operation of the mind in ascertaining the biblical message. Luther said, "The Bible cannot be mastered by study and talent," but rather by prayer and inspiration.¹² Thus for him the new birth was a definite prerequisite for understanding the Scripture.

The essence of truth was to be discerned through a study of the Word of God. In his epistle to Micron, Menno says: "What I wrote that one should not swear at all in worldly dealings was taught me not by any gloss of the old serpent but by the Word of God. Matt. 5:37, James 5:12." In effect, this was using the written Word to interpret itself. Menno was always ready to have someone disprove with other Scripture the interpretation or meaning that he ascribed to a passage of Scripture. If he could be convinced that he was wrong he would change. With the conviction that God's Word was truth, and with the further conviction that truth would remain truth forever, the Word must come to bear on the interpretation, and thus it becomes an aid to understanding.

The preceding discussion has pointed out at least one obstacle to understanding, and that is disobedience. The devil is most happy to possess the citadel of men's hearts to keep them from learning to know Christ's nature, Spirit and power. When men know what they should do, but do not act upon that, they are also going to lose what has been given to them. Here Menno undoubtedly speaks out of his own experience, for he knew what he had to do when the Spirit illumined his heart to see the fallacies of the Catholic Church and yet he did not act. One can actually note how at this point the conscience becomes another aid to understanding. Through it God directs men to yield to his leading; in fact, Menno says that through his conscience God revealed himself as he, Menno, studied the New Testament.¹³

If it be asked in how far the aids to understanding as we have noted them are given by God, and in how far man needed to act, the

¹¹ Preuss, *op. cit.*, 20, 35.

¹² E. H. Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation* (New York, 1956) 106, 111.

¹³ *CW*, 325 f.

answer is a twofold one. Man certainly must act—act in response to the stirred conscience, study the Scriptures, meditate and discuss, and finally give himself completely to Christ. Yet Menno can sum this up in the following words:

And so you see, my reader, in this way the merciful Lord through the liberal goodness of His abounding grace took notice of me, a poor sinner, stirred in my heart at the outset, produced in me a new mind, humbled me in his fear, taught me to know myself in part, turned me from the way of death and graciously called me into the narrow pathway of life and the communion of His saints. To Him be praise forevermore. Amen.¹⁴

In effect this speaks of the crucial role of the Spirit of God in aiding men to understand. The Holy Ghost illumined Menno so that he could understand. And Menno went on to point out that the Spirit continues his work, for he teaches the gospel truths to his children, and “writes them upon the tablets of our hearts with the gracious finger of his heavenly flame.” He it is who works the changed life in people and through his mighty power causes the true Gospel of Christ to “joyfully progress among all nations. . . .”

When the Spirit leads in this way, and when men respond obediently, the outcome is that the “powerful word of the Lord is more and more miraculously breaking forth.” This says something about the way in which Menno conceives of the process of understanding as taking place. There is an illumination by the Spirit, there are evidences of his work by the fruits that are brought forth, and Christ’s cause goes forward. And further, Christians grow in grace and knowledge constantly. Littell is right in his observation that this is a far cry from the unwholesome emphasis on election characteristic of one type of Protestant orthodoxy. The Word’s renewal or its condemnation was determined by the response of the hearer.¹⁵

Menno believed that other people can be a help in one’s understanding. But a basic difference is seen in the understanding of the preacher’s or interpreter’s office. Calvin saw the teaching office given by the Church as qualifying him to teach and from this nothing could move him. He could stand on his interpretation because he was a teacher of the Church, and when he compared his interpretation with others, it was obvious that his opinion must hold, for he found it in the Scriptures!

There is no question here of their opinion or mine. I show what I find in Scripture. And I do not hasten to come to a conclusion without considering it well more than three times. What is more, since what I

¹⁴ CW, 671.

¹⁵ Franklin H. Littell, *A Tribute to Menno Simons* (Scottsdale, 1961) 20.

say is well-known, no one can contradict it without plainly denying the word of God.¹⁶

Luther began with the firm conviction that the Word of God authenticates itself. He had unbounded faith in the ability of the Word to work the task of reform without any further aid. Said Luther:

I have opposed the indulgences and all the papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy, that never a prince or emperor inflicted such damage upon it. . . . I did nothing; I left it to the Word.¹⁷

But Luther did not remain so sure of this working as time went on. The laity needed to be instructed. The German Reformer did not go as far as did his followers after him, but after some years it became evident that he would have to lend a hand. He requested the State to enforce the Church's (his) interpretation, even though at first he claimed he did nothing but preach and write the Word. One must observe how Müntzer was cynical and scornful of Luther's strong emphasis on justification by faith, because it was contingent on an understanding of the Bible. And the Bible could be interpreted correctly only by the theologians, who were in turn hand in glove with the civil authorities. This was nothing but a racket! "The civil authorities were determined to so influence the interpretation of the Scripture that the masses of the people would not be enabled themselves to understand its social implications."¹⁸ With Menno the basis was different. It is regeneration that makes a man fit for the office of teaching the Word. Menno was a leader not because of the institution or office, but because of his personal qualifications. When he was called to take up the duties of shepherding the flock, his manner of life and his devotion to Christ had prompted the brethren to present their petition to him. He agreed that there was a necessity of having teachers in the Church as over against assuming that all people had a natural knowledge of God. But, in the first place, the true teachers were the canonical writings, and secondly, they were those who lived by the injunctions found in those writings—particularly those of Christ and the apostles.

If the question is raised about the possibility of losing an insight which has once been gained, the answer for Menno is in the affirmative. The devil often succeeds in leading men astray. Men often

¹⁶ *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. John Allen, I: New Haven & Philadelphia, 1816) 3.

¹⁷ Quoted by John Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists: Luther, Melancthon and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague, 1964), 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

refuse to follow through on what they know to be the right, and they ultimately lose the insight which they already have. And still one more thing: men often bend God's Word to suit them, thereby warping and losing what they already have.

From the question of understanding we now move on to some other problems which Menno encountered as he read his Bible.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE TWO TESTAMENTS

Because of the religious experience which Menno had he was in agreement with the majority of Anabaptists in emphasizing the New Testament over the Old. He too insisted that the Old could not be understood without the New. In analyzing the Old Testament Menno resorted to a spiritualization of its contents. An illustration of this spiritual interpretation is seen in Menno's discussion of Jan van Leyden's blasphemous claims that he was a third David. Among other things Jan was justifying his use of the sword. The Dutch Reformer was quick to insist that the Christian is to leave the armour of David to the physical Israelite and the sword of Zerubbabel to those who build the temple in Jerusalem, "which is a figure of them and a shadow of things to come."

Now we should not imagine that the figure of the Old Testament is so applied to the truth of the New Testament that flesh is understood as referring to flesh; for the figure must reflect the reality; the image, the being, and the letter, the Spirit.

If we take this view of it we shall easily understand with what kind of arms Christians should fight, namely with the Word of God which is a two-edged sword. . . .¹⁹

This citation indicates with a series of couplets how Menno pictures the reality of the New Testament over the Old. One of the first functions of the Old Testament is preparation. Man is a sinner, estranged from God, and it is the purpose of the Old Testament to prepare the human heart for the help that is available.

. . . I say, search the Law diligently. For it points out to you, first, the obedience to God and righteousness required of you; and also the weakness of your sinful flesh, your impure and evil-disposed nature; and that you are already condemned to death, according to the rigor of the above-mentioned righteousness, since you, through your inherent weak nature and evil-disposed flesh, do not walk in the required righteousness as God has commanded and required of you in His Law.²⁰

Secondly, Menno sees the role of the Law as being one of promise.

Behold, my reader, such a faith as mentioned is the true Christian faith which praises, honors, magnifies, and extols God the Father and His

¹⁹ *CW*, 42 f.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 818.

Son Jesus Christ through loving fear and fearing love, for it recognizes the good will of the Father toward us through Christ. It recognizes, I say, that all the promises to the fathers, the expectation of the patriarchs, the whole figurative law, and all the prophecies of the prophets are fulfilled in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ.²¹

For Menno it was clear that God from the very beginning revealed his goodwill to men, and that he was therefore working with a definite purpose. Menno's discussion often refers to "the fullness of time," which is closely related to the promise function of the Old Testament.²²

Besides noting the Old Testament as preparation and promise, Menno also made much of the devotional use of the Old Testament. From the characters on the historical stage Menno drew inspiration and challenge to live in his own perilous times. How comforting it was to observe that God had been with his people, leading them through the severest vicissitudes. Their examples of trust were to be followed. But their ethical conduct was to be measured against the standard of Christ.

Menno's superior evaluation of the New Testament was but the corollary of his basic affirmation—the centrality of Jesus Christ. Following from the purposes which the Reformer saw the Old Testament to have served, he took it very seriously. Whereas Sebastian Franck placed no emphasis on the revelatory character of the Old Testament, seeing it purely as history, Menno viewed it quite differently. God was definitely leading men, and no one could deny that it, the Old Testament, was binding up to the time of Christ. The figures and shadows were used with a purpose and many of them were mighty vessels of God who proclaimed the Word of God as he led them. When Christ came he fulfilled the Law and enabled man to "realize" fully what God wanted of him. Menno says that men can now go beyond the Old Testament Law, for they are directed to Christ. Moses served his day, now Christ has given a new commandment. And this must now be heeded, for this ever-blessed Jesus is not only the One in whom the Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled; he is also the true Teacher and Finisher of the New Testament.²³

Menno was fully aware of the ethical issues which stemmed from his theological concerns. His statements about warfare and the use of the sword grew out of his position of seeing the difference between the Old and New Testaments. Any vindictive approach to

²¹ *Ibid.*, 339.

²² For Marpeck, cf. William Klassen, "The Hermeneutics of Pilgram Marpeck," *Dissertation*, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1960, 105 ff.

²³ *Ibid.*, 603, 927.

a person is ruled out because the New Testament forbids revenge, and the law of love must motivate the believer. Christ's command is too clear to be ignored, and wherever the Old Testament stipulations are not in accord with the teachings of Jesus and the apostles they must give way. This means that the oath may not be used any more, it means that infant baptism cannot be justified, inasmuch as Jesus' command was to baptize those who believe, and it means that Christians take seriously the high ethical standards for a Church without spot and wrinkle.

THE PROBLEM OF THE SPIRIT

With this understanding of the relationship of the two Testaments, how did Menno meet the "problem of the Spirit"? Such a question seems just a bit odd, for did we not observe earlier that the Spirit illuminates the Scriptures, and thus opens their message to men? That it is the Spirit who drives God's truth home to the human heart, who gives counsel, who enables men to judge correctly and to preach the Word unblamably, by his power? Surely it was this understanding which caused Littell to make the statement: "Nowhere among the figures of the sixteenth century Reformation or Restitution do we find a richer doctrine of the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, than in Menno Simons."²⁴ Why then do I refer to the problem of the Holy Spirit? In answering that question let us observe first of all that for Menno the Spirit's role is an all-pervasive one. Through the power of the Spirit and the Gospel truth in Christ Jesus the serpent is wholly vanquished. Through heavenly goodness and grace men may be born of the Word of the Lord through the Spirit. Men have graciously been permitted to find through the Spirit the great treasure, the true knowledge of the kingdom of God. These are counseled from above, and in coming to the Word of God they do not rely on visions and angelic inspirations, and should there be some of these visions, they would need to be conformable to the Word and Spirit of Christ before they could be valid.

The reference to visions has brought us to the point where we actually confront the problem to which we have alluded. Simply stated, it was the position of the spiritual extremists who believed that their own angelic inspirations might well supersede and even contradict the Scriptures. For them the Scriptures did not constitute any real authority. They paraded the freedom of the Spirit.

Menno could not separate the Spirit and the Scriptures. On the

²⁴ Littell, *op. cit.*, 57.

one hand the understanding of the Holy Spirit is attained by a study of the Scriptures, while on the other the Scriptures cannot be understood except the Holy Spirit interpret them.²⁵ In his *Fondament* Menno refers to the fact that his opponents argue that one is not to quench the Spirit, meaning thereby that they might legitimately go beyond the word of Scripture. Menno categorically rejects such a position. When Paul made his statement in I Thess. 5:19-22, he spoke this not to those out in the world, but to the prophets, pastors and preachers in the Church of Christ.

If they teach anything not in accordance with the Scriptures and true faith, we are to avoid it. For if any man prophesy, let him prophesy according to the proportion of faith, Rom. 12:6, and this is that to which John exhorts his disciples: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God."²⁶

On the basis of this and similar statements, it is apparent that Menno cannot be accused of being a spiritualist. He had a similar problem to that of Luther when he was forced to speak to the spiritual excesses in his own brotherhood. But in meeting these excesses, he adopted a policy which forced him to cling fearfully to the exact words of the biblical text. Herein he lost some of the freedom which characterized Luther's approach. However, this very position removes any basis for the accusation that for him "the Spirit soared beyond control."²⁷

While this unwholesome attitude of Menno's was evident in his polemics against those with spiritual excesses, it was not so marked in his conversation with other groups. He was quick to say that the Spirit of Christ was not bound by languages and learning, but he did insist that the Spirit would work in such a way that there would be unity and accord among the children of God. Marpeck was equally clear on the matter of unity and his emphasis is seen repeatedly. Klassen has observed that "no aspect of Marpeck's view of the church is more pronounced than his emphasis on its unity."²⁸ However, when he saw that others and he were not agreed, he did not accuse them as readily of not having the Holy Spirit. Rather he spoke of them as lacking in knowledge and the understanding of Christ. Both Luther and Menno were more severe. Luther, for example, did not deny that Müntzer had a spirit, but he claimed that it was a satanic spirit. Menno spoke similar words when he said that the motivation of his opponents stemmed from the pit.²⁹

²⁵ *CW*, 496, 964.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁷ Oyer, *op. cit.*, 30 f. Cf. Julius Koestlin, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, II (Stuttgart, 1901), 220 (2nd rev. ed.).

²⁸ Klassen, *op. cit.*, 84.

²⁹ *CW*, 179.

It should be observed here, however, that Menno's statements about those in his own brotherhood were also much milder. He knows "that preferences, judgments, affections, and minds are varied, and that the consistent grasp of the truth and the fear, the Spirit, and the unction of the Lord are not possessed by everyone in the same fullness." While Marpeck was careful to point out that the interpreter could not force the Holy Spirit, and that he should be very careful not to let personal desires masquerade as the Spirit's leading, Menno was more concerned to draw attention to the Scripture and its correct meaning. He did not spell out the "freedom" of the Spirit in the same way that Marpeck did, but he too had some practical checks to determine whether what was proposed was according to the Spirit or stemmed merely from human opinion. Here again, obedience to the Word's injunctions became a test for the correctness of the interpretation, and Menno does not hesitate to ask his reader to consider the "reasonableness" of his teaching. Together with this, however, he is clear on the fact that reason must be subservient to the Word of God. "I therefore beg all pious hearts for Jesus' sake to submit their reason to the Word of the Lord, to think and believe concerning God as the Scriptures command and teach."³⁰ So also other "authorities" were not accepted, as for instance, the Church Fathers, except they agree with Scripture. If they were contrary, there was no further question—they were ruled out. Then Menno resorted to higher doctors—the apostles and prophets; against these none could stand. These were the mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit, and they took precedence over all others.³¹

Another facet of the problem of the Spirit was the tension arising from varying interpretations given to the same text, the issue of letter and spirit. In the nature of the case, Menno's emphasis varied, depending on who his opponents were. When arguing with the spiritualists he tended to place undue emphasis on the "letter." When he argued with the Reformed and the Lutherans, particularly when these in turn argued from the Old Testament, he insisted on the "spiritual" interpretation. This was spelled out in its fullness against those who insisted that justification of certain New Testament rites, such as baptism, was thereby an analogy of Scripture in the Old Testament practice of circumcision. But if one is literal here, Menno insisted, this is nothing less than discounting the reality of a Savior who has come. Jesus has changed the literal and sensual ceremonies of the Law into new, spiritual, and abiding realities.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 863.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 310, 216.

Menno's spiritual interpretation was one of seeing the old fulfilled in Christ; it insisted that for its time the Old Testament was completely binding. But the Old Testament stipulations could no longer be taken as applicable for the present. That would be to take them literally. Taken spiritually, however, they mean in effect that that which Christ and his apostles taught is now to be taken as normative for the Christian. Menno drew attention to the fact that all those who taught anything contrary to the word of Moses were false prophets. By analogy, any prophet who now teaches contrary to the Spirit and commands of Christ is a false prophet. The strong emphasis on the commands of Christ and a strict adherence to them as advocated by Menno causes him to go from the very spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament to a very literal interpretation of the New Testament. To be sure, Menno makes a number of noteworthy statements about the children of God having spiritual freedom. God's work is not a keeping of the dead letter, but a heavenly power—a moving of the Holy Ghost. But while he gives strong support to this spiritual freedom, he does not go along with those who are at liberty to follow unscriptural teachings and practices. This would be nothing less than despising the Spirit and doctrine of Christ, and furthering the cause of Antichrist.

Menno tried to resolve the tension between the literal and the spiritual in several ways. Firstly, he gave the general statement that the doctrine of the New Testament is a service of the Spirit, not of the letter. Secondly, he said the Old Testament must now be interpreted spiritually. For him the literal adherence to the statements of the Old Testament carried the connotation of disobedience, but this connotation drops away in the New Testament context. Thirdly, while the literal meaning was usually followed in the New Testament, the context of a passage and Christ's total teachings needed to be considered in any one particular instance. This would then give the directive for the interpretation to be given to a specific passage.

With all that has been said, it is still a fact that at times Menno's New Testament literalism bordered on an unhealthy biblicism. Menno's fear of excesses (such as the Münster episode) caused him to give primacy to the New Testament; his fear of rampant spiritualism caused him to adhere to the biblical text more and more, even though he insisted that it was the sense which was the important thing. But there were situations where it was not a matter either of spiritual excesses or of a wrong use of the Old Testament, and yet where Menno was driven to a rigid approach to the Scriptures. A case in point is infant baptism. How strongly Menno felt on this

issue is seen from the fact that he treated it several times.³² Christ's injunctions must be taken seriously. Menno insisted that people had no right to institute other forms setting forth the relationship of man with God than those which Christ himself has given. Although Menno placed the Old Testament on the same base as the New as far as obedience expressing itself by faith is concerned, this did not permit men to transfer circumcision to the New Testament. Since the command of Christ obviously referred to believer's baptism, we have no right to find justification for infant baptism by way of implication or by way of analogy—that infant baptism is in the New Testament what circumcision was in the Old. Here is one of the crucial differences when it comes to exegesis of passages dealing with baptism. While the Reformers maintained that logical deductions drawn from the Bible had equal authority with the Bible itself, Menno insisted that this was not permissible—this was mere philosophizing and rationalizing. He therefore went to an extreme in the opposite direction: when the Reformers challenged him to show them where infant baptism was forbidden in Scripture, he countered with the question: where is it commanded? The rule for Menno (as for some other Anabaptists, including Grebel) became: what is not specifically commanded in the Scriptures is thereby forbidden! Such a position is of course very difficult to hold, and in Menno's case it certainly pushed him toward a biblicism which was not always wholesome.

Our consideration of Menno's position could easily end in a purely academic analysis. While we may grant that his encounter with the Bible is highly interesting, we can easily pass on without reflecting seriously on the issues involved. I choose therefore to be "preacher" for a moment to make a few applications.

It is obvious that a number of parallels from the sixteenth century are mirrored in our own time. Unfortunately we still have our modern "Schoolmen" for whom the Bible is merely a theological text-book. It becomes the source-book from which one draws support for an espoused position. With the proof-text method, which was obviously not foreign to Menno, one can prove anything. One need only think of the preoccupation with the Incarnation of Christ to have a case in point. While one may be consoled by the fact that Menno's arguments were no worse than those of his opponents, it is apparent that a fitting of passages into a pattern or system which one already has constitutes a real danger to understanding the mes-

³² The three selections in which the topic is treated extensively are: *Foundations of Christian Doctrine*, *Christian Baptism*, and *Reply to Gellius Faber*.

sage of God's Word. While Littell is correct in citing the passage from *Christian Baptism* in which Menno himself protests "proof-texting," Menno's practice unfortunately did not quite measure up to his theory.³³ We need therefore to call out clearly that the Bible was not written to proof-text any position. It was written to bring men to the saving truth.

A further parallel is that of the callousness with which men tend to react to the biblical message. Evident here is a real danger which confronts the person who would understand God's message. While we need not try to reincarnate Jonathan Edwards, it is imperative that men be asked to hear, believe, and repent of their sins.

There is another danger that besets us—the danger arising out of an unwillingness to penetrate further into God's truths because we fear the outcome or because the cost is too great. We need not try to bring persecution upon ourselves, but we are called to an applied study of the Word of God with the willingness to plumb the depths of his truth. Much of the spiritual mediocrity of the present is due to the fact that people are not willing to apply themselves seriously to what God has made available for them. This too is disobedience and disobedience always brings its grave consequences.

Finally, there exists with us too the selfish and proud attitude arising out of a comparison of our understanding of Scripture with the understanding of others. Invariably "we" suggest that "we" are right and that "they" are wrong. Let us learn from a study of the Reformation struggle with its many shadows, that we need not perpetuate those shadows. Let us rather unite as people under God to take up anew the study of his Word. Let us exhort and admonish each other to the end that our differences may be bridged and that our agreements may lead to significant relevant conclusions.

We are reminded that one of the most impelling motives for learning to interpret the Scriptures is the necessity to understand precisely that which we seek to communicate to others. If Paul reminds us of the solemnity of failing to preach the gospel, it is equally solemn to misrepresent that written record which presents the gospel. Menno's willingness to be instructed is an example to us here. May the world see in his followers, who today recognize not only that heritage, but who are first and foremost followers of the Christ, that they are obedient servants proving to be neighbor to all whom they meet.

³³ Littell, *op. cit.*, 12.

ANABAPTIST HERMENEUTICS: THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

WILLIAM KLASSEN

“That weighty word ‘hermeneutic’ seems slowly but surely to be creeping into the vernacular.” With these words a prominent bookseller recently advertised a new book dealing with the subject of hermeneutics. The advertisement called attention to the fact that *Time* magazine had recently devoted major space to the subject of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics has traditionally been understood as the study dealing with the process of interpretation. It used to be assumed that it dealt primarily with rules. Now it is generally recognized that exegesis is both an art and a science, and although it must reflect upon valid and invalid methods of procedure hermeneutics is much more than merely the formulation of rules, and exegesis is more than the implementation of those rules.

In the area of Anabaptist studies a number of scholars have posed the hermeneutical question in their study of the early leaders. To some extent all of us are captivated by our own prejudices and interests. The early in-group students of Anabaptism, engaged as they were in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversies, defended the Anabaptists staunchly as Fundamentalists, or at least as orthodox proponents of the traditional faith. In reaction, some sought to demonstrate that the Anabaptists were really neo-orthodox; at the very least they were existentialists! Still others think that surely the Anabaptist orange has been squeezed dry and that we had better seek to extract nourishment elsewhere.

It may therefore be in order to suggest the perspective from which these matters are here treated. The assumption that the Anabaptists spoke a final word for their followers is denied implicitly by their position. When we study them we are primarily interested in discovering the issues which constituted the center of their life and thought. Their positions have naturally been subjected to the test of history and most of their positions have shown an incredible ability to survive rigorous scrutiny. Others have been modulated according to the historical exigencies of subsequent years and should not merely on the basis of such modulation be considered suspect. Our task certainly is not to defend the Anabaptists with our words, since their strongest defense is always a community of people translating their beliefs into courageous corporate life. Without that a verbal defense is merely words blown into the wind.

There is a certain urgency about the question of how the Anabaptists used the Bible. The question would not be urgent if Anabaptists found sources of authority outside the Bible. It is, however, extremely urgent for people who claim to base their total position upon biblical revelation. It is certainly conceivable that a group of people living four hundred years ago who approached the Bible earnestly and naively could be shown to be wrong today on the very premises that meant most to them. If they were most interested in what the Bible says, it is conceivable that we, their followers, might conclude that it really does not say what they thought it did. Obviously if their position cannot be defended upon the grounds of sober study and understanding of the text, if they were either too busy or too uneducated to give the Bible the kind of thorough study it deserves and arrived at their positions intuitively or charismatically, then a rejection of their position should be the first order of the day. No emotional attachment to them or historical antiquarianism should detain us in this rejection, nor should anyone consider us irreverent iconoclasts for carrying the original Anabaptist premise to its logical conclusion.

The question about the hermeneutics of the Anabaptists is also raised because hermeneutics is *the* question in modern theology. No longer do only the Fundamentalists study hermeneutics in an attempt to find ways of approaching biblical texts according to certain rules. Now major efforts of biblical scholars are devoted to hermeneutic¹ consultations. Indeed there is evidence to indicate that

¹ It is now considered avant-garde to drop the "s." On the importance of this distinction see J. M. Robinson, ed. *The New Hermeneutic* (New York, 1964) 39. Says Carl Braaten, ". . . now we are asked to be tidy in observing the difference between hermeneutic and hermeneutics—only now for the first time we are one-up on the Germans because they have no way of making this distinction." "How New is the New Hermeneutic?" *Theology Today*, 22 (1965):220.

biblical scholars are so busy thinking, writing, reading, and talking about hermeneutics that there is no time to write commentaries on the biblical books or to really do exegesis. This strange habit of the specialist to concentrate on preliminary issues is not confined to biblical scholarship.

Why, then, ask about *Anabaptist* hermeneutics? One reason is that modern theology has given Protestantism a vital shot in the arm through its renaissance of Reformation studies. Calvin and Luther renaissance movements have done great things for their followers. We are a part of the history of the Reformation, and whether we like it or not, whether consciously or unconsciously, we always relate to our past.

Two issues are isolated in these lectures. These issues are more or less central in all of Anabaptism, at the very least they are central in Swiss and South German Anabaptism. The first issue can be described as "the relation of the spirit to the letter." The expression needs to be clarified, however, before we look at the way it illuminates Anabaptist hermeneutics. The Apostle Paul himself provided the impetus to this expression in his discussion of the relation of the Spirit to the letter in II Corinthians 3. The interpretation of these Pauline terms has moved in several directions. Some, through the influence of Plotinus, the Neoplatonist, disparaged all matter and sought for the spiritual rather than the material. To be free from the material was the ultimate freedom and toward this they worked. They believed in spirit against letter. These interpreters ignored the fact that when Paul refers to "the Spirit" in this context he is obviously thinking of the Holy Spirit. Others in a more general way refer to "the letter and the spirit" and indicate merely a literal approach over against finding the meaning of what is being said. Tell a person like that to "go jump in the lake" and his literalism leaves him no other option but to literally get wet. This second group believed in the letter against the spirit. A third group, by far the majority, saw in the letter-and-spirit distinction a welcome open door to allegory. Back in Greek times men argued that the Homeric poems were not to be taken literally and that the deeper meaning could only be found through allegorization. Through Philo, the Jewish writer of the first century, allegory entered the Christian tradition at Alexandria and it remained to plague the majority of commentators until the sixteenth century.

One book which sharply posed this matter during the years of the Reformation was Augustine's *De Spiritu et littera* which was written in 412 in an effort to inform Marcellinus about the dangers

of Pelagianism. Both Strasbourg and Zürich promoted the book widely in German and Luther had high praise for it. Carlstadt was enthusiastic enough about it to edit it and write a commentary on it as well as promoting it widely in German.² Yet no two groups of these promoters of Augustine's thesis on the letter and the Spirit received the same message from the book. Luther naturally stressed Augustine's emphasis on grace, whereas Bucer and Zwingli buttressed their concept of the sacrament with an appeal to Augustine. Strangely enough, even the Anabaptists appeared to appeal to Augustine in their radical distinction between the Old and New Covenants, an idea strikingly prominent in this book by Augustine but apparently of little interest to the other Reformers.

The Anabaptists approached this expression from II Corinthians 3 in a quite different way. They followed Augustine in assuming that the primary point at issue in the discussion of this chapter was the relation between the Old and New Covenants. Thus when Paul said "the letter kills" he was referring primarily, if not exclusively, to the Old Testament and the letter of the Law there. He cannot have meant the New Testament writings or any literal observance of them because the New Testament letter does not kill but the words of Christ bring life.

The Anabaptists have often been described as biblicists and literalists. Though there are some anecdotes which support this, the totality of evidence cautions us not to use these terms for the Anabaptists. J. C. Wenger apparently uses this term merely to say that they used the Bible extensively.³ If this is all that is meant not much harm is done, but usually the term "biblicist" is reserved for someone who assumes that the Bible is self-explanatory, that it needs only to be memorized and repeated to be effective. The biblicist is William Jennings Bryan as portrayed in *Inherit the Wind*. Unable to overcome the opposition by clear reasoning he resorts to quoting the Bible from memory beginning with Genesis 1:1. The Pietists of Württemberg who argued that one could consume wine because it is mentioned in the Bible but that beer was forbidden because it is not, were biblicists.⁴ In that sense the Anabaptists were not biblicists, although in the early years they had a difficult time cutting them-

² The significance of Augustine's work in this area for the course of the Reformation has been noted by Gordon Rupp, "Word and Spirit in the First Years of the Reformation," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 49 (1958):16. On Carlstadt's commentary on it, see Ernest Kähler, *Karlstadt und Augustin, Der Kommentar des Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt zu Augustins Schrift De spiritu et littera* (Halle, 1952).

³ See J. C. Wenger, "The Biblicism of the Anabaptists," in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. by Guy F. Herschberger (Scottsdale, 1957) 167-79.

⁴ See the articles by E. Schott and G. Gloege on "Bibilizismus," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (third edition) I, Cols. 1262 f., and Herman Diem, *Was heisst Schriftgemäss?* (Neukirchen, 1958) 9-10, all of whom consider biblicism an erroneous approach.

selves off from the biblicism of Zwingli.

It is of course difficult to transport ourselves into that world of the Reformation when the Bible was first made available to the common man. We have been surfeited with Bibles in more versions than we can ever possibly read and have been admonished from early childhood to read the Bible and therefore have a hard time imagining what it must be like to find the Bible after years of being enslaved by human instruction and calcified dogma. Yet this same release often takes place today on the mission fields of South America where new converts find great joy as the biblical truths are opened to them. They move through the barrier of illiteracy and at the same time find the freedom of Protestantism, and as they do so the Bible takes on an almost magical significance. This is precisely what happened in the sixteenth century. Printing had been invented just fifty years earlier. Although many of course could not read, nevertheless with the coming of Luther's Bible in the vernacular new worlds of spiritual discovery opened up to the masses. When they argued about whether one needed the written word to be saved they were not modern liberals talking about emancipation from the written code or mystics thrilled with their spark of divinity but they were merely asking whether Uli the Ploughman or Hans the Baker would have to learn to read before God could really speak to them. The answer was evident: God speaks through the man reading the Word and through the man speaking the word in the church, not only through the written word known as the Bible. We obviously do these men a great injustice and commit a grave historical blunder if we assume that they were addressing themselves to modern controversies which involve the written and spoken word. For them it was a supremely practical issue—not a theological one at all. They were thinking about communication, not revelation.

The issue "letter or spirit" was most vigorously debated between the Anabaptists and the Spiritualists. In Anabaptist research the parting of the ways between Spiritualism and Anabaptism has generally been dated as 1540 when Marpeck and Schwenckfeld finally had it out in what George Williams has imaginatively called "the *Damenkrieg*."⁵ Feminine followers of both men who were tempted to vacillate between the two leaders finally forced Marpeck and Schwenckfeld to engage in extensive literary duels, some of which seem somewhat pedantic to us today. More recently, however, we are of the opinion that the lines were rather clearly drawn between Anabaptists and Spiritualists at least as early as 1530 in Strasbourg

5 G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, 1962) 466-71.

and according to John Howard Yoder probably even earlier in Switzerland.⁶

What is a Spiritualist? Walther Koehler made the definition "separation of word and spirit" famous.⁷ The persons who represent this position can easily be identified. They include Jakob Kautz and Hans Bänderlin who definitely submitted to believer's baptism,⁸ and also Sebastian Franck, who admired the Anabaptists but never actually joined them. Schwenckfeld was a Pietist with strong spiritualist leanings and Hans Denck also had leanings in this direction although his keen intellect, artistic connections, and subtle mind make him hard to place in a theological straight-jacket. Too often Mennonite scholars have hoped to find in him the exactness of theological expression found in some other writers and chastised him for his vagueness, but it is doubtful that we ought to treat him as severely as we have in the past. He is due to be rehabilitated and again find his place in the mainstream of Anabaptism.

The Spiritualist is one who says that he does not need the outer ceremony of baptism, Bible reading, church attendance, or Lord's Supper because God is a Spirit and therefore is not to be sought in the externals of life. Like Plato he may argue that truth cannot and should not be written down because the living word cannot be written down without mortal consequences.⁸ Why these Spiritualists nevertheless wrote books so diligently is somewhat of a mystery; at least they never addressed themselves to this apparent inconsistency in their own approach, an inconsistency Marpeck was quick to point out.

No one in Anabaptism so vigorously opposed Spiritualism as did Marpeck. During four years at Strasbourg (1528-32) he met most of the Spiritualists and engaged in extensive discussions with them and their followers. During the year 1531 he published two books, the contents of which have just become known during the last few years. In these books he addressed himself both to the spiritualizers within Anabaptism (Hans Bänderlin) and those on the fringes (Caspar Schwenckfeld). In both instances the attack against Anabaptism was the same. The external means are no longer needed because we live in the age of the Spirit. In the Old Covenant, it was argued,

6 John H. Yoder, "The Prophetic Dissent of the Anabaptists," in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, 96. His point is abundantly illustrated in the newly published writings of Hubmaier.

7 Walther Koehler, "Die Spiritualisten," in *ARG* 41 (1948):181: "Man pflegt doch gemeinhin unter Spiritualismus die Distanzierung von Wort und Geist zu verstehen im Gegensatz zu ihrer Verbundenheit bei Luther. . . ."

8 *Phaedrus*, 274B-277B. In Epistle VII, 344C Plato seems to disparage writing because when things are written down people tend to depreciate them. In *Phaedrus* the relation of writing and remembering is discussed. In neither does the Neoplatonic depreciation of writing on the basis that the written word is material rather than spiritual occur.

God's people were infants and so God gave them an elaborate ritual, priests, and ceremonies to play with. Now however, we are grown up and no longer need these playthings. Why then did Jesus institute baptism, Lord's Supper, ordination, etc.? The Spiritualists answered that Jesus played along with these toys as a concession to the weak Jews. As a means of gaining an entrance into the Jewish faith Jesus allowed such external things as baptism to stand but with the death of the apostles and in our own advanced state these ceremonies have completely outlived their usefulness. What is now needed, the Spiritualists argued, is a completely spiritual religion.

The reply given to this approach reveals that Marpeck had an uncanny ability to comprehend the biblical view of reality. Not only did he argue that such an approach would obviously not take seriously enough the commission of our Lord which was binding on us since we are still in the apostolic age, but he also argued that such a spiritualization of the church would mean its demise. To be sure, he admitted, God could have sent his Spirit into the world in order to save the world. Instead he sent a Son who came to men as a lowly carpenter from Nazareth. Naaman the Syrian could have been healed by a command; instead he had to wash in the filthy Jordan. Jesus could have ordered the man born blind to be healed; instead he used such lowly means as mud and spittle. Here Marpeck saw the clue to the divine-human encounter. God uses lowly means to communicate to us. Yet in these despicable forms he visits us with grace and mercy.

The focus of the Spiritualist attack came on the observance of the sacraments. There was a good deal of discussion among the Marpeck group whether the term "sacrament" was allowable and they concluded that it was, provided it was used in the sense in which the early Church Fathers used it. Roman Catholic usage assumed that a metaphysical change takes place in the elements and that something sacramental is inherently efficacious. Naturally Marpeck rejected this, but against the Spiritualists he argued that something really does happen when baptism takes place or the Lord's Supper is observed. In terms of human experience a change does take place. God is at work in the act of baptism. Under no circumstances would he concede that these rites and ceremonies were mere symbols. He rejected the Zwinglian notion that they were symbols (*Zeichen*) and argued instead that they were witnesses (*Mitzeugen*). The bread and wine were concrete witnesses to the body and blood of our Lord, broken and spilled on our behalf. The water of baptism was an effective witness to the water of the Word through which we are

cleansed and renewed. Without these witnesses the Christian life would be immeasurably impoverished.

Marpeck said similar things about the Bible. While Schwenckfeld continued diligent study of the Bible, there were more radical Spiritualists for whom even the Bible was superfluous. Marpeck did not fall victim to a sterile conception of biblical authority which assumes that the Bible is the Word of God from cover to cover. He says explicitly that it is not the ink and paper, not the perishable, creaturely parts of books or human speech which is God's Word, but rather that which it contains, its spoken and written sense.⁹ Torsten Bergsten has commented that Marpeck does not represent an "orthodox verbal inspiration theory but rather his view of inspiration can be characterized as a combination of the theory of real and personal inspiration."¹⁰ Paul Peachey is correct in stating that "Anabaptist biblicism has in modern times become widely identified with the Fundamentalist view of Scripture." He further states that he believes that "few outside influences have so adversely affected modern Mennonites as this confusion."¹¹ For Marpeck the Bible is important not because of a view of inspiration he has inherited, but it is important rather because of the dynamic way in which it has continued to speak God's word to the congregation of which he is a part.

The relation of the letter and the spirit was also seen differently by some of Marpeck's fellow Anabaptists. It seems to have been a significant issue between the South German group and the Swiss Brethren. What place did Marpeck occupy in the relations of the Swiss and South Germans? The relation of the South Germans as a group to the Swiss Brethren as a group needs further investigation. As late as 1561 a complaint from the mountain workers lists the "Bilgerer, Sattlerische, and Gabrieliter" as the various Anabaptist sects in Strasbourg.¹² Since any grouping among the Anabaptists either geographically or otherwise must be undertaken with caution,¹³ and since it is not necessary to do so here, we will confine

9 *Verantwortung* II, pp. 518 ff.; "Und ist nit das sichtlich, vergenglich, creaturlich papierbuch oder dinten, ja es ist eben das ewig, lebendig, weslich wort gottes, auf welchs dann die schrift und eusserlich predig nit allein. . . sonder sy ists eben, . . . durch iren unsichtlichen, geistlichen synn und verstand an im selbs von gott und dem h. geist ausgeend als geist und leben, ja gott Christus und h. geist im herzen durch den glaube. . ."

P. 521: "Wir haissen nit dinten und papier oder was an buechern heylicher schrift oder an den inhaltenden verfassten, geredten und geschriben synn mainen wir." See also pp. 529 ff.

10 Torsten Bergsten, "Pilgram Marbeck und seine Auseinandersetzung mit Caspar Schwenckfeld," *Kyrkohistorisk Arsskrift*, 1957-58, p. 35.

11 *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, 333.

12 Krebs-Rott, #736. Does this indicate the three main groups, Swiss Brethren (Sattler), South Germans, and Gabrielites? Probably one has to be cautious with this evidence, since it comes from the mouth of people who wanted to discredit the Anabaptists. On January 14, 1556, Peter Novesianus (Krebs-Rott, #674) said there were Hutterites, Hofmannites, "Schweitzerische" and "Bilgramites" among the Anabaptists.

13 See Heinold Fast, "Pilgram Marbeck und das oberdeutsche Täuferum," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 47 (1956): 223, 225.

ourselves to the epistles which constitute the major interchange of ideas between Marpeck and the Swiss Brethren. The term "Swiss Brethren" is used not as including Pilgram Marpeck, as all Anabaptist studies have done prior to Kiwiet, nor to cover the whole group of Swiss Brethren, as does Kiwiet. The question of the precise usage of that term can remain open for the purposes of this investigation.

That the early Swiss Brethren had a biblicism bordering on legalism which they learned from Zwingli is generally recognized, the efforts of Grebel's biographer to prove the contrary notwithstanding.¹⁴ In view of the fact that all the correspondence between Marpeck and Swiss Anabaptist congregations reflects differences (and since the correspondence is not restricted to St. Gall and Appenzell where in the earlier days excesses were rampant),¹⁵ it would appear evident that Marpeck was at odds with the whole Swiss Brethren movement. That he nevertheless felt himself to be in basic harmony with the early movement is evident from the reference to Schleithem in the *Kunstbuch* (by Scharnschlager). It is, however, quite obvious that the answers given by the Marpeck group to ethical questions are considerably freer than the more simple biblicism of the Schleithem Confession.¹⁶ The number of letters exchanged and the urgency of those extant indicate that Marpeck viewed this difference in approach to the Scriptures as a most serious problem—and well he might for on this battleground was fought the hardest battle between biblicism and spiritualism, the letter and the spirit, law and gospel, freedom and enslavement. From the standpoint of Marpeck's hermeneutics this literary exchange is invaluable.

If it was necessary to begin with the Spiritualists on the primacy of the Word become flesh, with the legalists within Anabaptism it was necessary to emphasize the primacy of the Spirit, while asserting the empirical union of letter and spirit. In his treatise on true faith Scharnschlager gave expression to the basic objection of the South Germans to the Swiss when he says:

Since we have been made alive through faith and live by faith alone as it says in Romans, how could such life come through external works as certain of the Swiss are insisting [*treiben*], as though such life, salvation, or rule of God consists in works, for it consists alone in faith. I speak of the faith that comes today after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. . . .

14 Harold S. Bender, *Conrad Grebel* (Goshen, 1950) 175. It is not difficult to see how the approach adopted by Grebel that the New Testament must teach something for it to be adopted would lead to biblicism unless definite efforts were made to avert it. Who would defend the argument, "what the Scripture does not positively teach and command is forbidden?" (Bender, *op. cit.*, 176). Menno also took this position (Cornelius Krahn, *Menno Simons* [Karlsruhe, 1936], 135).

15 Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz visited St. Gall in an attempt to expunge these excesses. See Kessler, *Sabbata*, pp. 164 f.

16 Cf. "Oath," *ME* 4.

I refer to such a righteousness before God which comes by faith in Jesus Christ to all and upon all who believe. Further, they are all made righteous without merit by his grace, by the redemption through Christ, whom God had advanced as a mercyseat through faith in his blood. [After quoting Romans 5:1 he continues]: There it is clearly seen that just as eternal life, so also essential goodness [*Frömmigkeit*] and righteousness (valid before God) comes alone through faith. Therefore those who promote external works, cleansing the outside of the cup, saying, "don't wear this," "don't bear that" and the like should desist from it and perceive that such a faith (which is not a gift of man but of God) might be planted and built up. . . . (KB, fol. 255b).

That the issues between the Swiss and Marpeck were primarily hermeneutical, involving both the problem of the Old Testament and that of the spirit and the letter is apparent. Marpeck's most extensive discussion of the place of the Scriptures as well as the Law came in his correspondence with the Swiss. While the concrete issue which is repeatedly discussed is an ethical one, namely Christian freedom, Marpeck does not separate systematic theology or biblical theology from the practical life of the church.

The point at which this discussion between the Swiss and Marpeck takes on additional importance and relevance is the difference in conclusions drawn from the biblical message by separate believers, all studying the same Scriptures ostensibly under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit. Marpeck did not assert, as he might have, that since there was discord they obviously did not have the Holy Spirit, but he explicitly rejected such a position and affirmed that they were zealous lovers of God and his Spirit, but lacking in the knowledge and understanding of Christ (KB, fol. 27).^{16a} To be sure, all knowledge on this earth is only fragmentary and once a man begins to think that he knows, it is certain that he does not know.

There is no lack of Spirit that there should be factions between us, but there is still a deficiency in our weak conscience and immature understanding and it is from this that divisions have come (KB, fol. 56b).

Marpeck's conversations with the Swiss cannot be understood apart from his abhorrence of all sects and his deep desire to realize the unity of Christ's body, the church (V, 72f., 89, 584; TB, Preface). No aspect of Marpeck's view of the church is more pronounced than his emphasis on its unity. At this point too he differed radically from the Spiritualists, for they insisted that the more divisions the better;

16a Abbreviations in this article are as follows: *Confession* (1532), *Conf.*; *Clare verantwortung* (1531), CV; *Klarer unterricht* (1531), KU; *Vermanung* (1542), TB; *Verantwortung* (1544), V; *Testamenterleuterung* (1549), TE, *Kunstbuch*, KB.

for in that way the true members of Christ's body would be shown to exist.¹⁷

If the unity of the church formed the theoretical theological basis for Marpeck's discussion with the Swiss, the immediate occasion was given by concrete ethical issues. We are considerably handicapped by a lack of major sources available from the Swiss side and must therefore describe the Swiss position as it comes to us from Marpeck's writings; though no serious attempt will be made to evaluate whether or not this is caricature, or whether Marpeck's account of the Swiss problem may be distorted.

Evidence of the Swiss position is found in a letter by Cornelius Veh, an elder from Moravia, to the church at Appenzell and Zürich, dated 1543, which describes at length the danger that Christians will not be genuine but instead counterfeit coins moved by themselves rather than by the Spirit of Christ. To test these spirits the Scriptures have to be read, for the Scriptures testify to Christ and only as these spirits are tested by the Scriptures can their genuineness be determined. This is made more difficult because they too use the Scriptures, but according to the letter, as did Satan when he tempted Christ, and by omitting certain words or portions of Scripture. Often they distort or confuse the Scriptures. Like Pilate they use a language which means nothing to them, although sometimes it nevertheless is a witness to others (*KB*, fol. 219b). The touchstone is Jesus Christ and they must be tested by this stone. Unfortunately many are seeking Christ in the wrong places. There are still some (Anabaptists) who seek him in the desert, denying themselves the usual foods, drink, and clothes hoping thereby to follow the example of John the Baptist and others of the apostolic age. Veh objected to this since John's asceticism was meant as an object lesson to the Pharisees and has no relation to us (*KB*, fol. 220b). Others seek him in the closet and "no one can reach him there but we who have the key." After listing a number of groups who take this approach, he warned that Christ cannot be found in the bread or any other place apart from the human heart:

... as is the custom of the false Christians, some even called Brethren, that

¹⁷ On the basis of I Cor. 11:19. After speaking about the true fellowship of believers in the presence of Christ, Marpeck says: "Sonst entslag ich mich aller Sekten, Rottierungen, und Versammlungen . . . sonderlich deren die wider die Geduld Christi . . . das leibliche Schwert brauchen im Reich Christi zu herrschen . . ." (*KB*, fol. 41). In the same vein he writes: "Die rechte und wahre Gemeinschaft des Leibs und Bluts Christi ist einigkeit, und Einigkeit im hl. Geist ist wahre Gemeinschaft, dann da kann und mag nicht Spaltung sein im Leib Christi, weils nur ein Glaub, ein Herr, ein Geist, ein Gott Vater unser aller ist, so ist je solche Gemeinschaft mit einem Geist, mit Wasser getauft, zu einem unzerspaltnen, ungeteilten Leib mit vereinten Glieder" (*KB*, fol. 66). Bucer argued that the presence of many sects and heresies is a sign that the true teaching of the Holy Gospel is present (*Wie leicht unnd füglich christliche vergleichung der Religion* [Strasbourg, 1545], LXXIII). This argument is used also by Franck, Bänderlin, and Schwenckfeld.

is *Täufer* who would like to be that, of whom some say Christ is here, others there, once there in the Scriptures, or in other dead creatures like craftsmanship or other things which one should not or may not use. At another time they see it in temporal goods, as community of the same, whoever does not hand them over and forsake them cannot come to Christ, nor can he find him, even less be saved, unless he sell it and give it to the other (as they say the poor) children of God and similar statements, as has been the manner of the two harmful and destructive sects called Swiss and Hutterian, and as even today in particular the Hutterians practice with regard to temporal goods (*KB*, fol. 221b).

Veh castigated this approach and admonished his readers to test themselves to see whether they had the Holy Spirit within themselves, for

Whoever does not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in his heart is no Christian but a castaway [Verwürflingö, nor can he call Christ truly a Lord because he is not ruled by his Spirit (which is Love) *KB*, fol. 222).

Veh may be discussing the problem at St. Gall in a passage in this epistle where he referred to the slothful servant who hid his talent in a napkin. Under the guise of uncertainty they refuse to do anything. They do not know whether they can even trust those who have baptized them, and are suspicious of those who carry letters to them. They wish merely to stand still. These must be left alone until the Holy Spirit punishes them or spews them out of his mouth (*KB*, 224b f.). Apparently some of the Swiss objected to the work of the Marpeck group in Switzerland as though this portion of the country were not under its mission mandate. These subterfuges are rejected by Veh as evidence that they do not have the Spirit of Christ. For the rest Veh says they are still in one faith, mind, and spirit with them (*KB*, fol. 226).

Similar indications are found in the correspondence of Marpeck with the Swiss. His two closely related criticisms of their church life are their legalistic biblicism and their alacrity and sharpness of judgment.

When one has become accustomed to reading Schwenckfeld's charge that the Anabaptists were hopelessly mired in the dead letter of the Scriptures it comes as somewhat of a jolt to find Marpeck chiding the Swiss for their devotion to the letter. Veh mentions such false devotion (*KB*, fol. 218b) and Marpeck refers to counterfeit Christian freedom as always adorning itself with the dead letter (*KB*, fol. 24b, 35). Having stressed the importance of Christian judgment taking place in harmony with Christ, he continues:

But the devil is using his weapons against us in all places in part and fragmentarily (*in Teil und Stückweis*) through the dead letter (*KB*, fol. 37f.).

The devil confronts them with the two dangers of not judging at all, and of prematurely judging at all times.

As will be seen in the next lecture, the legalism of the Swiss came to expression in regulations on clothes, bearing arms, etc. Veh's correspondence also alludes to the Swiss restrictions on clothing and other matters he considers adiaphorous (*KB*, fol. 220b).

Marpeck complains that their tendency to legislate violates the basic freedom of the Christian in Christ (*KB*, fol. 28). Hypocrites conceal their lack of spiritual life under human ordinances and commandments (*KB*, fol. 35), and whoever legislates, commands, or orders "usurps the office of the Holy Spirit."¹⁸ For Marpeck the only law in the Christian life is the law of love (*KB*, fol. 49), and the only sin is the sin of disobeying God's word (*ibid.*). This adherence to the letter and attendant legalism has in Marpeck's judgment caused the Swiss to become victims of the malady of judging prematurely and harshly (*KB*, fol. 28), a malady so serious that he refused on that ground alone to recognize them as a valid church of Christ. He could find no evidence in either Christ or Paul of such a censorious attitude and so could not see how they could be a church.¹⁹ Church discipline cannot be exercised in the flippant manner evident among the Swiss where even the elders were under the ban, some even under the double ban (*KB*, fol. 62).²⁰ Some of their bishops have prostituted their holy calling of helping and assisting the weak into an unholy desire to judge and condemn the weak and the erring. It is the function of the bishop to care for the sick, not to kick them out.²¹ Leaders are tolerant of the weak and the erring just as Christ is tolerant of us and strengthens us (*KB*, fol. 57). Where all spiritual life is gone it is a different matter, but to judge the men who are not living up to a certain level because of human weakness is not in the spirit of Christ, especially when the spirit of hasty condemnations rules in the church. He concluded his first letter to the Swiss with the plea:

18 *KB*, fol. 36: "Darum wer setzt, gebeut, oder verbeut, zwingt, treibt, straft oder richt vor der zeit der offenbarung guten oder bosen frucht, der greift dem hl. Geist des Herrn Jesu Christi (wider die lieb, Gut und Gnad in sein herrlichkeit, Gewalt und Amt), und lauft Christo Jesu vor." The danger of legalism is noticed also in *KB*, fol. 37b; 40b; 48.

19 *KB*, fol. 66: "Wir haben euch aber billig bisher und noch von unserer Gemeinschaft in Christo abgestellt um unbilligs grichts und bannens willen etc." Earlier he has said that even if they did recognize them as a church, God would not do so (fol. 65), and the reason why they cannot be recognized is that they do not judge according to the "sündverzeihender und sündbehaltender hl. geist christi" (fol. 65b).

20 The seriousness of church discipline is evident from Marpeck's plea that discipline follow the order prescribed in Matthew 18 and if the offender does not hear the church "so geht erst das urteil mit trübsal, angst, und trauern, und mit grossem schmerzen und leid, dann es gilt ein glied am leib christi des herrn. . . . Es wird den andern gliedern am leib christi ohn schmerzhaften grossen schmerzen und trübsaln nicht zugehn" (*KB*, fol. 58b). In Kessler's *Sabbata* we find similar evidence. After describing their modest dress and their attitude toward oath and sword he continues: "Verging sich einer hierin mit etwas, so wurde er von ihnen gebannt; denn es war ein tägliches Ausschiessen unter ihnen" (p. 46).

21 "Nicht so schnell aus dem hause gottes zu stossen" (*KB*, fol. 57b).

Above all it is my prayer for the sake of Christ that you seek judgment from Christ and exercise it there. Learn from him longsuffering, patience, and tenderheartedness. May the merciful Father supplement all my shortcomings and insufficiencies which I still find daily. For the greatest uneasiness in my conscience (*spalt in meinem Gewissen*) about you i that I fail to find such quick, premature judgments and condemnations concerning every little thing with Christ and his apostolic church as I find among you (*KB*, fol. 61b).

In summary, it can be noted that Marpeck was caught between the spiritualist critique of Anabaptism, which dubbed it a heresy of the letter,²² and a sizeable proportion of his fellow Anabaptists who were fast becoming ensnared in a legalistic biblicism which picked certain issues and gave them absolute value, while the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith were slipping from the place of central importance. Marpeck registered a vigorous protest that human effort was beginning to take the place of divine grace and that the accomplishments of men were pushing the achievements and satisfaction of Christ out of the center. In this incipient threatening change he saw a deadly foe of the Anabaptist movement which he withstood with all the strength and vigor at his command. Whether he ever convinced the Swiss Brethren, no one knows, but that the foe against whom he fought was not an imaginary one, subsequent events in the Mennonite church have shown only too clearly.²³ Where discipleship moves to the center there is always the danger that the imitation-of-Christ ideal supplants the Pauline emphasis of God working in one and Christ being formed within one. The one is anthropocentric, the other theocentric. Even in the tension between spirit and letter Marpeck's basic Christocentrism comes strongly to the fore.

Marpeck had come to resolve the tension between the spirit and the letter. The letter was important but not as a dead standard by which to live; rather it was a vehicle used by the Spirit to communicate its message to him, a vehicle which would be necessary as long as man lives on the stage of history. The letter had been infused with the Spirit and had become "a living letter in his heart" (*KU*, C vb).

²² Sebastian Franck, *Chronica* (1531), fol. 444b: "den buchstaben der schrift (den sye steiff für sich hielten)." In general it should be remembered that Franck felt the Anabaptists were so diverse "das ich nichts gewiss vnd endtlichs von ynen zuschreiben weiss" (fol. 445).

²³ Mennonites continue to attract the notice of others by their devotion to "the letter" (Louis Cassels, United Press International Release, December 4, 1959). The extremes which our biblicism has taken is amusingly illustrated in the article "Suspenders," *ME*, 4:664. Many divisions in the Mennonite brotherhood have resulted from a different hermeneutic and the inability to admit that when we differ in our interpretation of a given passage of Scripture and especially in its application, this does not necessarily denote unfaithfulness.

THE RELATION OF THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS IN PILGRAM MARPECK'S THEOLOGY

WILLIAM KLASSEN

It is no surprise that with the restoration of the Bible to the common man at the time of the Reformation one of the most urgent problems to emerge was the authority of the Old Testament. A host of issues including the use of images, war, usury, worship, and infant baptism, all in varying degrees, were supported by reference to the Old Testament. Two major hermeneutical issues of the Reformation were the relation of the Old and New Covenants and the relation of the Word and Spirit. On both the Anabaptists provoked the discussion and determined its course to a much greater extent than is generally recognized.¹ Harnack was surely mistaken when he asserted that the retention of the Old Testament in the church's canon at the time of the Reformation was due to an unavoidable accident.² It was no accident that the Reformers retained it; it was a logical result of their basic conservatism. Nor was it an accident that the Anabaptists retained it; they accepted it as God's revelation and struggled (not always successfully) to reconcile its differences with the New.

The prominence of this issue is illustrated by the way it emerges at every major disputation between Reformed and Anabaptists. At the Frankenthal Disputation of 1571 it was obviously the most burning issue that separated the two groups.³ Baptism, the oath, bearing of arms, and other issues continued to divide the Anabaptists and Reformers because the Old Testament was viewed differently.

Considerable energy has been expended in the effort to ascertain the origin of the clear distinction made among the Anabaptists between the two covenants. Much has been made of the apparent dependence of the Anabaptists in their view of history upon Joachim

¹ Apparently James D. Wood, *The Interpretation of the Bible* (London, 1958) 99-101, is the first to include the Anabaptists in a history of hermeneutics as giving a positive contribution, although he mentions only Denck and Hubmaier. George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, 1962) 815-32, has observed that "there was a very close connection between the way the Radicals conceived of the two Testaments and the way they conceived of the nature and the mission of the church and the solidarity and destiny of all mankind" (p. 816).

² *Marcion*, 248.

³ In the published *Protocoll: Das ist/alle handlung des gesprechs zu Franckenthal* (Heidelberg, 1571), the record of an extensive discussion between Anabaptists and Reformed, the relation between the two Testaments is the first major item of business and reappears on pp. 19, 44, 45, 87-90, 272 f., 601 f.

da Fiore. In these treatments Pilgram Marpeck is often overlooked.⁴ As far as Marpeck is concerned there is not a shred of evidence that he is indebted to Joachim da Fiore. He would have rejected da Fiore's doctrine of the three ages as well as his "doctrine of the concordance between the Old and New Testaments which rests on the fundamental unity of the People of God in history."⁵ The periodization of history which some find in the Anabaptists and the restitution element so strongly emphasized by Franklin Littell are both altogether lacking in Marpeck.⁶

It seems quite plausible to find Marpeck's differentiation between the Old and New Testaments growing out of his experience at Strasbourg. His position is obviously hammered out against those of Bucer, Capito, Johannes Bänderlin, and Schwenckfeld. As he saw the way in which Bucer was led on his position on the Old Testament, Marpeck drove his stakes deeper and clung to his position.

It is our intention here to look at Marpeck's position on the Old Testament. A familiarity with the facts of his life and his strategic importance in the Anabaptist movement is assumed.⁷ Born about 1490, his life runs almost concurrently with that of Menno Simons and his importance stems from the fact that he was an Anabaptist almost from the beginning of the movement, his leadership extending into the second generation of Anabaptists in South Germany. He is one of the most prolific Anabaptist writers, his extant writings exceeding those of Menno Simons by the ratio eight to one. Recently two more anonymous Anabaptist books have been discovered, the style and content of which lead to the conclusion that the two lost booklets of 1531 ascribed to him have now been located.⁸

Of his writings mention will be made here only of the tome which he dedicated to the problem of the relation of the Old and New Covenants, the *Testamenterleutterung*. This book of over 800

4 In "The Hermeneutics of Pilgram Marpeck" (Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1960) I have pursued these questions at greater length.

5 Gordon Rupp, "Word and Spirit in the First Years of the Reformation," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 49 (1958):16. Considerable research has resulted in a lack of unanimity on the origin of the covenant idea itself. Gottlob Schrenk first asserted that Zwingli's covenant theology received its impetus from the Anabaptists (*Gottesreich und Bund* [Gütersloh, 1923], 36) and this was accepted by Walter Hollweg in his informative essay, "Bernhard Buwo, ein ostfriesischer Theologe aus dem Reformationsjahrhundert," in *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst und vaterländische Altertümer zu Emden*, 33 (1953):71-90. L. J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," *Church History*, 20 (1950:37-57) would seek its origin outside Anabaptism.

6 *The Anabaptist View of the Church*.

7 A complete description of his life and the fullest account of his writings can be found in my dissertation, "The Hermeneutics. . .," 9-45.

8 *MQR* 33:18-30, "Pilgram Marpeck's Two Books of 1531." As long as we attribute these books to someone else (so Ernst Crous in the article "Bänderlin," *RGG*³ I, 1496) or assume that they were both directed against Bänderlin (so Williams, *op. cit.*, 274) we cannot see clearly the significance of these years and the independence of Marpeck's position in 1531. The reading of these books and the extensive material presented in the volume edited by M. Krebs and H. G. Rott, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, Vol. VII (in two parts) (Heidelberg, 1959) make such a misunderstanding unnecessary.

pages is a concordance listing Scripture passages around a variety of themes, all showing how the Old and New Covenants differ, and how the Old Testament points beyond itself to the New and foreshadows the experiences of the New Covenant. It was written sometime after 1544, the exact date unknown. It was published by the Marpeck printing press at Augsburg before May 1550. This is a major source for our study, although every book written by Marpeck and almost every extant letter deals to some extent with this problem.⁹

Three things are attempted in this paper: (1) To view Marpeck's usage of the Old Testament in the framework of the larger Anabaptist usage; (2) To study the ways in which he outlined the relationship between the Old and New Covenants; and (3) To compare briefly Marpeck's position with that of Marcion. From such a study a few questions for modern Biblical theology may emerge.

I. PILGRAM MARPECK'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Anabaptists were sometimes accused of rejecting the Old Testament as Scripture.¹⁰ Because they categorically rejected the circumcision-baptism analogy so important for the retention of infant baptism and because they refused to allow the Old Covenant ethic to attenuate that of the New it was assumed that the Old Testament was not a part of their Bible. Evidence that any Anabaptist leaders rejected the Old Testament Scriptures has yet to be adduced. To be sure, Leonhard Schiemer,¹¹ and possibly others, cautioned their followers to read primarily the New Testament, but this in itself may already be a reaction to the preoccupation with the Old Testament seen in men like Thomas Müntzer and later the Münsterites.¹² Thomas Müntzer picked up the militant strand of the Old Testament while Augustine Bader¹³ and the Münsterites succumbed to a strict biblicism of the Old Testament which had disastrous results. It hardly needs to be pointed out that these aberrant groups have no claim to be considered as Anabaptists, even

9 See *ME sub voce* for full bibliographical details. Abbreviations are as follows: *Confession* (1532), *Conf.*; *Clare verantwortung* (1531), *CV*; *Klarer unterricht* (1531), *KU*; *Vermanung* (1542), *TB*; *Verantwortung* (1544), *V*; *Testament erleuterung* (1549), *TE*; *Kunstbuch*, *KB*.

10 So Caspar Schwenckfeld, *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum* (hereafter *CS*), VIII, 221:10 f.; X (February 27, 1547), 925.

11 Lydia Müller, *Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Täufer* (Leipzig, 1938) 1:45. According to the testimony of Hans Leupold the Anabaptists in Augsburg about 1527 when they gathered studied the word of God, principally the Gospels and the Prophets (*ME* 3:328).

12 See Heinrich Gresbeck's report in C.A. Cornelius, *Berichte der Augenzeugen über das münsterische Wiedertäuferreich* (Münster, 1853): "Wan et aver middagh was, dat sie setten und etten, so stunt dair ein iungh und las ein capittel uth dat olde testament oft uth den propheten" (p. 34 ff.). Cornelius (p. 59 f.) cites evidence that polygamy was justified at Münster on the basis of Genesis 1:28.

13 See *ME* 1:209 ff.

though the assertion is at times made that their attitude toward the Old Testament is Anabaptist.¹⁴

What then is the Anabaptist attitude toward the Old Testament? It is obvious that it is not uniform. An Anabaptist like Hans Denck thought it sufficiently important to translate part of it from the Hebrew, thus making a significant contribution to the history of the German Bible. Others felt an affinity to the prophetic strains in the Old Testament. The *Ausbund*, a hymnbook, and the *Martyr's Mirror* borrow heavily from the narratives of the Old Testament as does also the recently discovered *Codex Geiser*.¹⁵

The decalogue and the ethics of the Old Testament form the difficult portions and here there is less unanimity. Early this lack of unanimity came to the surface in the formation of a group of Anabaptists who were Sabbatarians, led by the influential Oswald Glait. This Sabbatarian party lived on for some time and is evidence that a group of Anabaptists took the decalogue so seriously that they tried to keep the one commandment which is not explicitly set aside by the New Testament church. Marpeck took a firm stand against this Sabbatarian party and insisted that no day of rest must be prescribed to the Christian.¹⁶

One of the striking things about Marpeck's use of the Old Testament is that he apparently used it as much as the New when the occasion called for it. In the *Confession*, his writing addressed to the Strasbourg Council (1532), he refers to the New Testament six times as often as to the Old,¹⁷ the ratio in the first part of the *Verantwortung* (1544) is eight to one, but in the second part (1550) it is three to two. In the *Testamenterleutterung*, where it is his studied purpose to discuss the relationships between the two Testaments, he uses them about equally. As in the case of Irenaeus, so Isaiah is

14 G. Uhlhorn, *Urbanus Rhegius* (1861) 108. Jakob Andrea in his *Drey und dreissig Predigen von den furnembsten Spaltungen in der christlichen Religion* . . . (Tübingen, 1568) asserts that the Anabaptists do not accept the Old Testament because their errors can be too easily refuted from the Old Testament (IV, 102) although earlier he has accused them of explaining the essentials of Christian piety from the Ten Commandments rather than from the Christian faith (p. 20).

15 The *Codex Geiser* is described by Harold S. Bender in the *MQR* 30 (1956):72-75. It contains a poem on the experience of Joseph which has 64 stanzas. Felix Manz, one of the early Swiss founders, used the Hebrew text of the Old Testament as a basis for group Bible study (Emil Egli, *Actensammlung zur Geschichte der Zürcher Reformation* [Zürich, 1879] No. 692, 4). Lydia Müller is certainly correct when she writes: "Das Täufern lebt an sich sehr stark im Alten Testament" (*Der Kommunismus der mährischen Wiedertäufer* [Leipzig, 1927], 25). On the prominence of the Old Testament in the Anabaptist hymnody see Rudolf Wolkan, *Die Lieder der Wiedertäufer* (Berlin, 1903), 185. J. Loserth comments on the themes of their songs: 'Die meisten Lieder . . . erläutern biblische Geschichten, wobei das alte Testament den Vorzug vor dem neuen hat. . . .' ("Aus dem Liederschatz der mährischen Wiedertäufer," *Zeitschrift des Vereins für die Geschichte Mähren und Schlesien*, vol. 27 [1925], p. 47).

16 See "Sabbatarian Anabaptists," *ME* 4:396.

17 The text of this confession is printed in Krebs-Rott, *op. cit.*, 416-528 with a careful refutation by Bucer. Together these two documents comprise one of the most significant statements about the differences between the Anabaptists and the larger Reformation on the relation of the Old and New Covenants.

Marpeck's favorite prophet and the book of Leviticus in the Pentateuch. In the New Testament Marpeck quotes most often from John and Paul, thus providing an exception to the assertion of Robert Friedmann that the Anabaptists lived primarily in the Synoptics and James and not in Paul and John.¹⁸

In Marpeck's usage the Pentateuch and the Prophets stand out. In contrast to the *Ausbund* and the martyr literature, which used the narratives and the Psalms, Marpeck used the historical material and the prophetic material. His estimate of the Old Testament may be illustrated by examining some of the recurring themes he drew from the Old Testament.¹⁹

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT AS PREPARATION

During Marpeck's stay in Strasbourg, one of the complaints he lodged against the state churches was that the Gospel was preached without any preaching of the Law.²⁰ In this respect Marpeck shows himself to be a true follower of Luther, who also held to the position that one should not preach the Gospel without first proclaiming the condemning Law. First the Law must reprove sin before the Gospel could come with its healing. The Old Testament accordingly is given a preparatory role. The function of the Law specifically is to bring knowledge and conviction of sin. How can a man come to the Gospel unless he is first convicted by the Law? asks Marpeck.²¹

The stress Marpeck lays upon the Law must be understood alongside his emphasis upon the Fall and its consequences. He insisted that knowledge or awareness of sin comes only through the act of committing a sin. Adam's sin caused man to inherit a proclivity or tendency toward sin, but this is not considered guilt in the sight of God. Only the exercise of the will results in sin, and the atonement of Christ covers innocent children and idiots.²²

In this view the awakening of the consciousness of sin becomes important, forming the necessary prelude to the acceptance of redemption. Within this context Marpeck defines the role of the Law as increasing the sorrows of humanity. While sorrow ruled until the time of Moses, the giving of the Law through Moses only increased sorrow and grief because man was merely forced back

18 "Conception of the Anabaptists," *Church History* 9 (1940):360 f.

19 According to a count by Ford Battles based on the *Institutes*, Calvin used the New Testament five times to every three times he used the Old. See John T. McNeill, "The Significance of the Word of God for Calvin," *Church History*, 28 (1959):135.

20 Krebs-Rott, *op. cit.*, 352:41: "Der ander jrthum, dass sie das evangelion (p. 353) vor dem gesatz geprediget haben, so doch niemans zum evangelion kumt, er erkenn vor und ee durchs gesatz sein sündt. Wie dann Johann baptista die buss gepredigt."

21 On Luther see Wilfried Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit* (Göttingen, 1956²) and on Marpeck, Krebs-Rott, *op. cit.*, pp. 441 ff.

22 According to John Lawson (*The Biblical Theology of Irenaeus* [London, 1948] 216 ff.) this view was already held by Irenaeus.

upon an earnest petition to God for help.²³ Before the coming of Christ man could not experience full forgiveness of sins and he could only be comforted by using the ceremonies which God had ordained for that purpose.²⁴ The ancients of the Old Testament possessed a proleptic piety; they desired to do good, but their desires were frustrated by their lack of ability to act according to their desires. These desires were as shadows which pointed forward to the light which was coming in Jesus Christ (*Conf.*, 177).

This was also the role played by John the Baptist. John preached repentance, revealed sin to men, and pointed them to Jesus. Marpeck refused to identify John's baptism with Christian baptism as was the vogue with the Reformers. In reply to Hubmaier's statement of the Anabaptist position Zwingli had argued that there is no difference at all between the two baptisms, and that repentance is all that is necessary for Christian baptism. It was argued with fervor that the New Testament knew nothing at all about rebaptism. How did they explain the apparent rebaptism of the disciples in Acts 19? Bucer insisted that since there is no such thing as rebaptism, neither by Christ, who was satisfied with John's baptism, nor by his disciples, the allegedly rebaptized disciples in Acts 19 in actuality had not received the baptism of John. If they had they would have known about the Holy Spirit according to Luke 3:16.²⁵

Since it is the nature of the Law to increase the knowledge of sin, a corollary of its action is that grace also increases and takes the upper hand. Consequently the Old Covenant can also be called the "first grace." Affirming the pre-existence of Christ Marpeck does not rule out the activity of Christ in the Old Covenant, but he distinguishes between Christ the pre-existent and *Jesus* Christ who appeared in history. Until the coming of the Son of God himself no full redemption was possible.²⁶ Christ is the physician who heals those who through the Law have been "crushed, broken, and pierced" (*zerslagen, zerschnitten, und zerbrochen. Conf.*, 181).

This stress on the negative preparation of the Law for the

²³ *Conf.*, 177, where the original reads: "Dann es ist die ursach aines hertzlichen gepets zu got umb hilff" and the statement on page 181: "The Law along with John is past, which brought only sorrow and tribulation, according to God's command" (page references in the *Confession* are according to the Wenger text [MQR 1938] corrected where necessary according to Krebs-Rott.).

²⁴ *Conf.*, 187.

²⁵ Bucer, Krebs-Rott, *op. cit.*, p. 27. Marpeck, *Conf.*, 181. On Zwingli see *Sämmtliche Werke* 3:238 ff.; 258 ff. For an interesting but questionable way out of this problem see Markus Barth, "Baptism and Evangelism," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 12 (1959):36 f. Barth asserts, "Christian baptism after the resurrection is essentially identical with John's baptism (Acts 2:38; 19:4-5; in the last passage the end quotation marks belong after verse 5, not verse 4)."

²⁶ *Conf.*, 17 f. The law and the prophets are called the first grace in *KB* fol. 285b. Marpeck appears to be indebted to Leonhard Schiemer here; cf. Lydia Müller, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, 1:60 f.

coming of Christ Marpeck finds in Romans 7, and may have been prompted by his extensive disagreements with Bucer on the place of the Old Testament. The amount of emphasis already placed on the radical difference between the Old and New Covenants in the *Confession* of 1532 is striking. The same stress is seen also in Marpeck's two other booklets of 1531, but there the trend of the discussion is quite different. There he also emphasized that the disciples did not have the Holy Spirit until after Pentecost, but the use of the Old Testament is extensive with the slightly self-conscious explanation that since the opponents used the Old Testament so much he would reply on their terms. The hermeneutical issue was different when dealing with spiritualizers, be they Schwenckfelders or of the Kautz-Bünderlin type (*CV*, a iii recto).

The spiritualizers applied the words of II Corinthians 3, "The letter kills, but the spirit gives life," to any letter, even that of the New Testament. To this both Marpeck and Scharnschlager objected because this would cut the motivating nerve of New Testament preaching. They both applied it exclusively to the Old Testament.²⁷

Furthermore the whole problem of the place of the letter or the Law in the New Covenant is involved. Marpeck criticized the Hutterites for using pressure (*zwang*) to get people to relinquish private property and insisted that the New Testament had no law that property ought to be held in common.²⁸ As recent discoveries show, however, his most serious disagreements on the question of legalism in the Christian life came from the "Swiss Brethren." Correspondence has come to light in the last decade which shows clearly that there were deep disagreements between a certain group of Swiss Brethren in the St. Gall-Appenzell area and Marpeck. The Swiss accused Marpeck and his followers of being too free. Marpeck in turn complained that the Swiss congregations were so zealous that they had every leader under the ban, and some of them were under the double ban. What were the concrete issues? Between George Maler, a close associate of Marpeck, and the Swiss they were something like this: Is it right to wear or weave bright-colored clothes? Maler said it was all right. The Swiss said not. The Swiss contended

²⁷ *V* 2:519. For Scharnschlager in particular see his "Sendschreiben an die Brüder in Mähren," which must have been written after the second part of the *Verantwortung*, published in *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 4 (1939):10-12, where he makes the statement: "Den wer nicht durch (das Alte Testament) getötet wird, der kann durch das Amt des Neuen Testaments nicht zum Leben kommen" (p. 11). Maler (*KB* fol. 152b), a member of the Marpeck brotherhood, rejects this interpretation as do also Peter Riedemann, *Confession*, p. 66 and Ulrich Stadler, *Glaubenszeugnisse*, 215. Marpeck may have been aware that this verse was the motto of the allegorists (see James Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 90). On Luther and Calvin see H. H. Wolf, *Die Einheit des Bundes. Das Verhältnis von Altem und Neuem Testament bei Calvin* (Neukirchen Kreis Moers, 1958) 46. For a persuasive argument that it should be applied only to the Old Testament see G. Schrenk, Kittel's *TWNT* 1:764 ff.

²⁸ *TB*, 265. Scharnschlager calls it a "gesetz, drang und Strick" (*KB* 223).

that one should not punish his wife, but Maler felt that this was carrying nonresistance one step too far. A wife is like a child and in need of discipline at times. Maler rejected the Swiss absolutism on not carrying a sword and also felt that marriages ought to be reported to the government.²⁹

For Marpeck the issues were clear. The Christian man is a free man and is bound to Christ and to His community. Marpeck's stature is seen in that he refused to become reactionary when he broke with Luther, but tried desperately in his own brotherhood to steer a middle course between the libertinism in the Strasbourgh Anabaptist brotherhood and the legalism of the Swiss Brethren. Fortunately, Marpeck's clear conception and devotion to Paul's gospel and the description of the Christian life assisted him in steering this course. He retained church discipline, but it was always clearly redemptive in approach; he practiced controlled communion, but he had none of the marks of the moralist who is so well portrayed in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Gospels. Was he right in throwing the Law out of court as far as the Christian life is concerned? On the basis of Paul, one is inclined to say Yes. The past four hundred years have also shown that the answer which he gave should not be ignored, even though it is admittedly easy to slip back into the comfortable routine of legalism and thus deny one's sonship. Marpeck's ideal of the Christian life where the Christian is guided not by any legalistic biblicism but by the Spirit working through the body of believers in the church may be a more dangerous ethical ideal—but no one has yet shown on the basis of the New Testament that this is not precisely what Paul was describing. While Scharnschlager, his close coworker, explicitly advocated *sola fide*-ism this did not mean that the Christian common life does not take recognizable form. Such a form is given by the living historical Christ himself.

For Marpeck the Law had a provisional preparatory role. Once one is in Christ, the Law is gone, and the Christian is driven on by the Spirit. This is one of the favorite images used by Marpeck—the driving of the Spirit. To keep this from degenerating into any subjective individualism Marpeck insisted that each motive, each drive of the Spirit be shared in the community of the Spirit where

29 In his correspondence with the Swiss, Marpeck discusses the place of the Law and the Ten Commandments at length. He is disturbed that they will not extend communion fellowship to him and one of his bitterest complaints against them was their refusal to give him a clear testimony, either that he was wrong or that he was right. To him their disdain for epistolary exchange smacked of spiritualism. Scharnschlager makes an even more basic criticism of the Swiss: To him it seemed as though the Swiss were substituting a works righteousness for the righteousness which comes alone through Christ (see KB 255b). On Maler's differences with the Swiss, see F. Roth, *Augsburg Reformationsgeschichte*, 4:614.

it would receive correction and purification. Those who did not subject themselves to this because of pride or other deficiency were disciplined, as the case of Helene von Freyberg clearly shows (*KB*, #28).³⁰

III. THE OLD TESTAMENT AS PROMISE

According to Marpeck a clear difference must be made between promise and fulfillment. The innocent child's sin is taken away by Christ's word of promise, but this word of promise is not to be identified with faith itself (*Conf.*, 184). The saints of the Old Covenant are called children of the covenant of promise but not a syllable of the Old Testament indicates that they were children of God in the same way as those under the New Covenant are (*Conf.*, 185f.). All of the Old Testament Scriptures are seen as pointing forward to Christ, as finding their fulfillment in the New Covenant. The parable of the scribe and his treasure chest in the Gospel of Matthew is applied by Marpeck to Christ. The treasure chest is the Scriptures, written by Christ himself, pointing through all the patriarchs, Law and Prophets to Christ (*KB*, fol. 284b.).

Marpeck's contemporaries took exception not to these ways of defining the relationship of the Old and New Testaments, but to the way in which he overstated the difference. Bucer repeatedly insisted that the Old and New Covenants are *idem in substantia* and the thorough study by Hans Heinrich Wolf on Calvin has shown that Calvin's position is virtually the same. Peter Martyr, another influential Strasbourg Reformer, as well as Melanchthon came to similar conclusions.³¹ Deriving his cue from Zwingli, Bullinger wrote a book on the subject in 1534 defending at length the thesis that there is no difference between the Covenants—in fact there is only one covenant; the difference resides merely in the administration of God.³²

Marpeck objected to these formulations because they obscured what was centrally important for him, namely the Incarnation of Christ. If the Old Testament saints were truly no different from the church of the New Testament, then it seemed to him that the

³⁰ For the contents of the *Kunstbuch* and its relevance for Anabaptism see the masterful description by Heinold Fast, *op. cit.* 212-42.

³¹ On Calvin see his *Institutes* Book II, Chapters X and XI, and Wolf, *op. cit.*, p. 116: "eadem doctrina, vera fidei unitas, fiducia unius mediatoris invocatio Dei patris, gubernatio eodem spiritu. Discrimen non in substantia, sed in accidentibus." On Peter Martyr, see Joseph C. McClelland, *The Visible Word of God* (Grand Rapids, 1957), 85 ff. and on Melanchthon, Hans Jörg Sick, *Melanchthon als Ausleger des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen, 1959) 56 f.

³² Heinrich Bullinger's book was first published in Latin in 1534 as *De Testamento seu foedere Dei unico & aeterno* . . . and later (1539?) in German as *Von dem einigen vnnd ewigen Testament oder Pundt Gottes*. On the influence and importance of this book see H. A. J. Lutge and G. Oorthuys, *Heinrich Bullinger. I. Het eenige en eeuwige Testament of Verbond Gods* . . . (Groningen, 1923).

Incarnation was merely a puppet show. If the Holy Spirit had been already active in the same way under the Old Covenant as he was under the New, John must have been mistaken when he said that the Holy Spirit was not yet given, for Christ had not yet been glorified (John 7:39). His fundamental objection to these positions was that history was not taken seriously. He refused to say, as did Peter Martyr, that the parts of Scripture were not new and old but rather Law and Gospel, distinct not historically but theologically.³³ Marpeck insisted that history be taken seriously. Before Christ's coming things were simply different. That in the sight of God Abraham was considered as righteous as any New Testament Christian Marpeck would not for a moment deny. But to call Abraham a Christian and to consider normative for the Christian the standards of the Old Testament was one of the greatest insults to the Incarnation of Christ Marpeck could imagine.

In defining the difference, Marpeck repeatedly used the term *wesentlich*. This term is taken from the German translation of the Bible (Col. 2:17 and Heb. 10:1) and therefore has no Platonic connotation whatever. Its meaning is simply defined as Jesus Christ (*TE*, Preface). The difference between the Old and New Covenants consists in Jesus Christ. In contrast Calvin insisted that only the form and not the essence of the Old Covenant was set aside in Christ.³⁴

Perhaps the most serious hermeneutical problem with respect to the Old Testament is the question of allegory or typology. How does one extract the contents of the Bible from its imagery using methods which have certain built-in safeguards within them? Luther arrived at the standard *was Christum treibet*, and this is followed in large measure by Caspar Schwenckfeld, Marpeck's most vocal critic. The problem is that with this criterion it soon becomes the major task of the exegete to find Christ everywhere in the Old Testament. When the exegete allows one insight to dominate his notion of Christ as Luther did, then certain books like the Apocalypse can be judged unfit for the Christian canon. In his use of the Old Testament Luther had not broken with allegory.³⁵ Nor had Calvin consistently done so, although he made considerably more headway in this regard than did Luther.

Marpeck used allegory where he felt that the source material

³³ J. C. McClelland, *op. cit.*, p. 87. Stadler in the work cited above takes the same position.

³⁴ Wolf, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

³⁵ Hans-Joachim Kraus quotes a statement from Calvin which shows "dass Luther in der Praxis seiner Auslegungen die Konsequenz jener hermeneutischen Regeln vermissen lässt, die er selbst aufgestellt und immer wieder betont hat" (*op. cit.*, p. 13).

(like the Song of Solomon, the Hagar story) justified it, but showed such a keen interest in the historical books of the Old Testament that he found hardly any time at all for allegory. This is the more striking when it is recalled that as he entered Strasbourg in 1528, Bänderlin was strongly and directly opposing Antiochan methods of exegesis and advocating allegory while actively leading the Anabaptists. Soon thereafter Melchior Hofmann began his activity in Strasbourg and again we have a hermeneutical type which is far from the sane methods used by Marpeck.³⁶ In spite of the fact that Marpeck knew no Latin, Greek, or Hebrew he had a fine sense for historical exegesis. This historical sense led him to delete certain typological phrases from a book of Rothmann that he took over and published as a confessional manual for his group. Equally clearly it can be observed when certain statements in the writings of Hans Hut or Schiemer which minimize the differences between the Old and New Testaments are either deleted or revised in the editions handed down by the Marpeck group.³⁷

Marpeck stressed the discontinuity between the two covenants rather than the continuity. It should be observed, however, that he saw his position as a corrective one. The Reformers read the New Testament back into the Old while the Anabaptists themselves were always in danger of dragging the Law back in through the back door. Fighting on both of these fronts and seeing the tragic results of a fanatic devotion to the Old Testament at Münster, Marpeck resigned himself to a usage of the Old Testament which placed high value on the devotional use of the Song of Solomon (here he is following the great mystics, notably Bernard of Clairvaux; although Origen, Ambrose, and many other commentators exegeted the Song.)³⁸ For Marpeck, in contrast to the mystics, the bride was always the church, never the individual.³⁹ For this and other reasons he does not belong among the mystics.

Did Marpeck overemphasize the difference between the Old and New Testaments? Undoubtedly. We do not accept his statements today and we have every right to criticize Marpeck for stressing so much the difference between Abraham and the Christian that he

³⁶ As ably shown by Peter Kawerau, *Melchior Hofmann als religiöser Denker* (Haarlem, 1954).

³⁷ The differences from the Rothmann text, which is taken over almost unchanged otherwise, with substantial additions are described in my dissertation, "The Hermeneutics of Pilgram Marpeck," pp. 126-35.

³⁸ On the history of exegesis of the Song of Solomon see F. Ohly, *Hohelied Studien. Grundzüge einer Geschichte der Hohelied Auslegung bis um 1200* (1958).

³⁹ Schwenckfeld (CS 7:442; 4:134) belongs in the camp of the mystics according to this criterion. James Denney says correctly: "Though Christ is sometimes spoken of as the husband or bridegroom of the Church there is no Scriptural authority for using this metaphor of His relation to the individual soul" (*Expositor's Greek New Testament*, 2:638).

fails adequately to note that the element that ties them together is faith-obedience—a good Pauline point. He allowed his opponents to force him too far in making assertions about the salvation of the patriarchs and few will follow him in the devious paths taken to get himself off that exegetical hook!

Let us pose a final question: Was he Marcionite? It depends a good deal on what we mean by Marcionite. What the church condemned about Marcion was not only his aversion to the Old Testament (for then there are many Marcionites today!) but basically his cleavage of the Godhead into an angry and a compassionate God. Of this there are only traces in Marpeck.⁴⁰ This is the more impressive because there are numerous Marcionite leanings in Marpeck. For example, the incident on the way to Jerusalem where Jesus refused to have fire come down from heaven on the Samaritans—a passage which Marpeck loved to quote as did Marcion also. Indeed one of the firmest textual supports for Jesus' reply: "Ye know not what spirit ye are," comes from the hand of Marcion (Luke 9:55).

Another point equally striking is the assertion by Marcion that Jesus did not merely go to Hades to proclaim his victory over death, but actually to proclaim forgiveness and offer salvation to the patriarchs.⁴¹ Between Marpeck and Schwenckfeld this was a recurring cause for contention, Marpeck maintaining that Jesus actually gave salvation to the patriarchs at that time while Caspar Schwenckfeld argued that Jesus merely announced his victory to them then.⁴² The publication of several editions of the Gospel of Nicodemus in German in Augsburg in 1525ff. would lead one to suspect that some Anabaptists, and Marpeck may indeed have been among them, read this booklet and thereby were sped on their way to reflect, not too productively to be sure, on how Christ spent the three days between his death and his resurrection. If Marpeck were to be accused of being Marcionite *in tendency*, this would be impossible to refute,

40 When, for example, he says in allegorizing the second chapter of the Song of Solomon: "(before Christ) the sun of the Father shone upon the earth as upon a parched earth through wrath with righteousness of the law. Therefore no fruit was found among men because of the heat and wrath of the Father." Then Christ came in the flesh. ". . . however, before the going down of the sun, Jesus Christ, mankind was still without fruit, but the abating of the heat of the day came about through the cooling off of the wrath of the Father" (*KB* fol. 12b). Schwenckfeld says the heat of the day is Christ (*CS* 7:361). The absence of any extensive stress on God's nature being different in the Old Testament from the New should caution us from seeing Marcion here. Marpeck at times allows his style to get away from him, as, e.g., when he explicitly says: "for the law of revenge (!) was given through Moses, grace and truth came to us through Christ" (*KB* #18). In the "Epistel von fünferlei Früchten wahrer Busse," August 1550, published by Heinold Fast, *Der linke Flügel der Reformation* (Bremen, 1962) 105-18) this reference is found on p. 105. On the basis of his total position it is clear that he would have been sympathetic to the adversative *de* supplied by certain manuscripts in John 1:17.

41 Harnack, *op. cit.*, pp. 169 ff.

42 For Marpeck's position, see *KB* 323; *V* 265 f.

and possibly the best one could do would be to observe that Martin Luther too has been accused of this.⁴³

One point at which Marpeck is not Marcionite is in his view of history and human development. While Marcion and Schwenckfeld, Bänderlin and Bucer (and even some of the Reformers), but especially Sebastian Franck, made much of the fact that humanity in the Old Testament had not been ready for the New, being still too childish, but that now we are ready to move beyond the infantile stages of the Old, Marpeck never accepted this position. He insisted that God's manner of dealing with man in history is determined by his sovereignty and not by man's progressive evolution. One needs only think of Harnack's Neomarcionitism to see that this position has considerable relevance for today. According to Marpeck we return again and again to the Old Testament and we never say that we have grown beyond using it, because it forms an organic part of God's whole dealing with mankind.

Finally, what relevance does this have for modern theology? H. Richard Niebuhr has recently stated: "The relationship of the Old Testament to the New is a central issue in biblical studies, and in the interpretation of the nature of Christianity."⁴⁴ This is certainly correct. In the ecumenical discussions about the Lordship of Christ this issue was also isolated as needing further attention.⁴⁵ H. H. Wolf in his study of Calvin's position on this matter admitted that Calvin's position may have only slight relevance for today for we will have difficulty accepting the answers as valid even when we accept the questions as such.⁴⁶ The possibility of such irrelevance exists for each sixteenth-century answer given to this issue.

In Marpeck's case, however, it is hard to consider his solution to the problem as irrelevant when we notice that he finds the element of continuity between the Old and New in the covenant-making God, and we find some of the best Old Testament scholars doing the same today. When that which binds Old and New together is promise and fulfillment we approach the position of Friedrich Baumgärtel. The differences are admittedly great yet the similarities may be even more significant.

⁴³ Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation* (London, 1955), p. 13 and p. 70.

⁴⁴ *The Advancement of Theological Education* (New York, 1957) 70. J. Coppens, *Vom christlichen Verständnis des alten Testaments* (Louvain, 1952) provides much material and bibliography on the prominence of this theme in Roman Catholic biblical scholarship. The book edited by Bernard Anderson, *The Old Testament and the Christian Faith* (New York, 1963) contains thirteen essays, presenting Bultmann's position and reacting to it. These efforts represent only the beginning for the resurgence of interest in biblical scholarship will force us to examine this issue in depth.

⁴⁵ *The Ecumenical Review*, 11: (July 1959) 447.

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, 7.

Our study of this problem, however, is motivated on a deeper level than merely to find surface differences and similarities. The Reformation discussions on this subject should lead us to strive for a measure of consistency in our approach to the Old Testament which was strikingly absent then.⁴⁷ Calvin, while he argued for substantial identification of the two covenants, refused to allow the women to adorn themselves with jewels simply because Rebecca had done so.⁴⁸ And the statement that Jacob kissed Rachel *before* introducing himself to her so profoundly shocked his "puritan" standards that he averred that there must be a textual transposition (Gen. 29:11). In actual fact Jacob probably introduced himself first and then kissed Rachel.⁴⁹

In the area of ethics Christianity has had most difficulty relating the two covenants and it is apparent that this is the area in which discussion is most needed. Precisely because Marpeck's position clearly distinguishes between Old and New Testament ethics, because he took God's action in history seriously, and because he was able to avoid both legalism and libertinism, his voice may still deserve our attention.

Jan J. Kiwiet argues that in spite of the fact that Marpeck was not a trained theologian (perhaps because of it) he appears to be much closer to the Hebraic thought-forms of the Bible than many of the major Reformers who were bound to Aristotelian patterns of thought.⁵⁰ Schwenckfeld was clearly tied to Neoplatonism which he had received via Augustine. This is even more true of Bänderlin and Franck. In his rejection of the distinction between the word and the spirit Marpeck also affirms the importance of history as the area in which God works. Having committed himself to this point of view he could not depreciate the Old Testament except in so far as it was depreciated by God's greatest act in Jesus Christ.

He took his position with the writer to the Hebrews: perfection was not obtainable through the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 7:11) but through one like Melchizedek who owed his priesthood not to a system of earth-bound rules but to the power of a life that cannot be destroyed. Therefore the "earlier rules are cancelled as impotent and useless, since the Law brought nothing to perfection" (Heb. 7:16-19). Clearly the writer to the Hebrews assumes that the first covenant was faulty (8:7) but his major assertion seems to be that

47 For the difficulties interpreters saw in one aspect of the Old Testament and their attempts to solve them see Roland Bainton, "The Immoralities of the Patriarchs according to the Exegesis of the Late Middle Ages and of the Reformation," *HTR* 33 (1930):39-49.

48 Wolf, *op. cit.*, 146.

49 Wolf, *op. cit.*, 148.

50 J. J. Kiwiet, *Pilgram Marbeck* (Kassel, 1957) 149 f.

the coming of Christ has made it obsolete and outdated (8:13). In order to establish the latter covenant the former had to be annulled (10:9). It is in such a context that the writer can say that the Law contains but a shadow, and no true image (10:1).

What Marpeck was doing was following these sayings in the book of Hebrews. We may call them a one-sided interpretation of the relationship between the covenants but before his position is brushed aside it would be necessary to take into consideration the attitude taken by the writer to the Hebrews on this very important question. Perhaps modern "Biblical theologians" might have as much difficulty fitting Hebrews into their scheme of things as they would Marpeck. At any rate the position espoused by Marpeck served as a healthy corrective in a day when the emphasis was placed on continuity between the two covenants rather than on discontinuity.

THE BERN DEBATE OF 1538: CHRIST THE CENTER OF SCRIPTURE

WALTER KLAASSEN

Sometime in late 1537 or early 1538 a handful of people sat together in the rectory of the church of Gross Hönstetten some twelve miles east of Bern in Switzerland. It was a group of men talking to the village pastor, Johannes Giner, about the possibility of a theological debate between them and the clergy of the established church in Bern. They were anxious that it be clearly understood that the debate was to be conducted strictly on the basis of the Bible, and that no appeals to other sources of authority be allowed. The men with pastor Giner were Anabaptists who had withdrawn from the established Reformed Church to form a church of their own, but for whom Giner was held responsible because they lived in his parish.¹

For the thirteen years of their life as a church in the Bern country they had been harried and persecuted. In 1531 a mandate had been issued that everyone must attend church regularly or be punished, at first with a warning, and upon further offense, with exile. In 1534 a second mandate required every person to go to communion three times a year or face unpleasant consequences.² These mandates were designed to expose the Anabaptists since on the whole they refused to attend the services of the established church. Some of their number had already been exiled. Perhaps they came to Giner with the request for a debate because they felt that one more attempt to clarify their views might lead to greater understanding of their position and easing of the oppressive measures against them.

The request was forwarded by Giner to the Bernese authorities who agreed to permit and to participate in such a debate, and the preparations began. These preparations revealed that the Anabaptist brethren had some conditions to meet before a debate could be allowed. Only five of their number could be from foreign parts; the rest must be the citizens of Bern. Furthermore they must agree in advance that the debate be conducted on the basis of both the New and Old Testaments, and recognize that every magistrate was insti-

¹ Imaginary reconstruction around the basic facts that the request for the debate was relayed to the Bern authorities by Giner, pastor of Gross Hönstetten. *Acta des gespræchs zwueschen predicannten Unnd Tauffbruoderen Erganngen, Inn der Statt Bernn von xja Mertzenns, biss uf de xviija Desselben Monats Im M.D. XXXVIIIten Jar.* Hereafter referred to as *Acta*. The author used a microfilm of a typewritten copy of the minutes which is located in the Goshen College Historical Library.

² *Mennonite Encyclopedia* 1:289.

tuted by God to reward the good and punish the evil. To these conditions the Brethren could agree with a good conscience. All Anabaptist participants would be given safe conduct to and from the debate.³

On Sunday evening, March 10, 1538, the Anabaptists, as well as many pastors of the established church, arrived at Bern and made for their respective places of lodging. Some of the Anabaptists had travelled far. Hans Hotz came from Grüningen, southeast of Zürich. Michel Ut and Georg Träffer traveled at least 160 miles from Stams in the Inn Valley of Austria and Ammergau in Bavaria, which meant coming over high and dangerous Alpine passes when the snow still lay deep on the mountains and in the valleys.⁴ As they came into the city across the Nydegg bridge they may have heard the clock on the now famous Zeitglockenturm strike the hour. It was new then, having been installed only eight years before. Their footsteps echoed along the arcaded walks of the Gerechtigkeitsgasse, which were then already a century old.

The clergymen of Bern, Sebastian Meyer, Peter Kunz, and Erasmus Ritter, were all prepared for the debate. After all, they had established the agenda, the most important feature of which was that the article on the relative value and authority of the Old and New Testaments was placed at the beginning. The importance of this procedure had been amply demonstrated in two earlier debates. The first took place in Bern on April 18, 1531, between the Bernese clergy and Hans Pfistermeyer, an Anabaptist leader.⁵ One of the principles upon which the clergy proceeded in that conversation was that Old and New Testaments were of equal authority in the argument. This proved so successful a procedure⁶ that it logically became mandatory to use it for the second debate, at Zofingen in the Bern country, in 1532. Heinrich Bullinger, the Zürich leader after Zwingli's death, wrote a letter to the Bernese clergy prior to that debate strongly advising that agreement on this point be the first concern. If such agreement could be achieved all other Anabaptist arguments could easily be taken care of.⁷ In fact, one gets the impression from the minutes of our debate that the Bernese clergy had carefully

³ *Acta*, 8.

⁴ Hans Hotz, Mathis Wiser from Bremgarten, and Georg Träffer were the main spokesmen for the Anabaptists. *Acta*, 2.

⁵ *Ein Christenlich Gespräch, gehalten zu Bern zwischen den Predicanten und Hansen Pfister Meyer von Arouw.*

⁶ Pfister Meyer recanted and left the Anabaptist fellowship. He was present at the debate of 1538.

⁷ Heinold Fast and John H. Yoder, "How to Deal with Anabaptists: An Unpublished Letter of Heinrich Bullinger," *MQR* 33 (April 1959): 83-95. The minutes of the Zofingen debate were published under the title *Handlungen oder Acta gehaltener Disputation und Gespräch zu Zoffingen mit den Widertöufferen.*

studied Bullinger's letter of six years earlier, and that their rigid adherence to the principles of interpretation which he outlined there made it impossible for them really to enter into serious conversation with the Anabaptists. It may be that the earlier successes made them ready to agree to this new debate, expecting that it might produce major results in the conversion of Anabaptists. In any case the method and not the desire to arrive at true understanding appears to have dominated the debate, and it is this that gives the whole affair the marks of artificiality.

Perhaps it is therefore not accidental that the original minutes are catalogued in the Bern state archives as part of Volume 80 of Useless Papers.⁸ One cannot avoid a feeling of complete futility and disappointment before one has read very far, and the temptation to give up, or to skip paragraphs because of the endless repetition, is hard to resist. To judge from the results of the debate one would gladly concur with the designation "useless papers." However, the document is of immense value in recovering the view of the Swiss Brethren on the various matters on the agenda. Our concern here is, however, not to discuss the individual points of the debate, but to look at their view and interpretation of the Bible as reflected in the minutes.

Since the Swiss Brethren views emerge clearly only by contrast with the views of their opponents, we will bow first toward the Bernese clergy, for they set the stage for the debate; they knew what they were after and how they meant to achieve it. What is said here about the Reformed clergy and the Swiss Brethren is based completely on the minutes of the debates.

The hermeneutical principles of the clergy are easily discoverable. First of all, Old and New Testaments are of equal validity and authority in debate. For example, the argument from Old Testament circumcision to infant baptism, and the Bernese position on the relation of church and civil government rested on the assumption that the Old Testament is of equal authority with the New.

Secondly, the clearer passage interprets the ambiguous passage. This was a principle accepted by all Protestants, by the Swiss Brethren no less than by the Bernese clergy. It sounds simple enough in the abstract; it becomes more ambiguous in the specific. Who, for instance, decides whether a passage is clear or ambiguous? For Luther the saying of Jesus "This is my body" was clear and simple; for Zwingli and the Bernese clergy it was not.⁹

⁸ *Acta*, 304-5.

⁹ Fast and Yoder, *op. cit.*, 94.

Thirdly, faith and love reveal the intention of Scripture and may in fact overrule the letter of Scripture.¹⁰ In the discussion of the ban the clergy admitted, for example, that church discipline among them was not what it should be, and tacitly acknowledged that they were not following the command of Christ literally. However, they said, faith and love must be applied here, since the practical social situation in Bern made a strict application of the rule of Christ impossible at this time.¹¹

In addition to this the clergy used the devices of formal logic such as syllogisms and the Aristotelian laws of logic governing the validity of syllogistic conclusions¹² to interpret Scripture. In the argument about infant baptism the clergy employed the following syllogism:

All who belong to God have the Holy Spirit.

Children belong to God.

Therefore children have the Holy Spirit.

There is no doubt that the syllogism is valid; the trouble is that the New Testament does not arrive at conclusions in that manner. However, at least in this debate the clergy assumed that because the syllogism was valid, it was also true and so they pressed their advantage. Since children thus have the Holy Spirit, they continued, they should be baptized according to Acts 10:47 where Peter says: "Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit?" From this then follows the clincher to their arguments that children should be baptized. Since they have the Holy Spirit they also have faith. And if the baptizing Brethren now asked where it says that children should be baptized they replied that it was included in the command to baptize all those who have faith.¹³

The clergy also appealed to the writings of the Church Fathers such as Lactantius, Origen, and Augustine as proof of the intention of the New Testament writers. These fathers all say that the practice of infant baptism was received from the apostles. Consequently the apostles must have baptized infants.¹⁴

Finally, the clergy claimed that it was impossible really to understand the Bible or to interpret it properly unless one had knowledge of the original biblical languages as well as of Latin. Uneducated people just did not have the equipment nor the ability to interpret Scripture and ought to leave it to the experts, namely themselves.¹⁵

¹⁰ *Acta*, 271-72.

¹¹ *Acta*, 282, 278, 287.

¹² A universal conclusion may not follow a particular premise. *Acta*, 166.

¹³ *Acta*, 169-70.

¹⁴ *Acta*, 152.

¹⁵ *Acta*, 119-20, 206, 299.

All of these principles and devices conform with the view of the Bible with which the clergy worked. For them it was a unitary body of divine revelation equally authoritative in all its parts excepting the ceremonial and dietary laws of the Old Testament. They believed that it was possible to get at its meaning and demand through application of these principles. Their basis then was *sola scriptura* with a vengeance. In fact it was so *sola* that Jesus Christ becomes for them little more than an incident, albeit an important one, among other incidents related in the Bible. He had next to no significance for individual and church, since everything of importance was present before Christ appeared. One is forced to the conclusion here that the clergy regarded the Bible as God's revelation rather than Christ, and all of their talk about salvation through Christ alone has a hollow ring. If this is a caricature of the Reformed position it is so only because on this occasion at least its representatives presented it thus.¹⁶ It should, however, also be recognized that in bitter controversy views tend to be expressed in extreme form. The clergy were clearly concerned to convince these separatists of their error and to restore the unity of the church. The lofty aim apparently justified the means they employed to attain it.

The Swiss Brethren also held to the principle of *sola scriptura* but their use of it differed widely from that of the Bernese clergy. This emerges clearly from the repeated charge of the clergy that the Brethren were literalists; they "hang on the letter too much."¹⁷ If their insistence on the importance of the words of the Bible had been tied to the view of the Bible the clergy held the charge would have had more validity. Certainly the clergy themselves were not free of it.¹⁸ The Swiss Brethren view of the Bible and its interpretation makes the charge of literalism something less than plausible.

The Anabaptists seem to have been the only Protestants in the sixteenth century who took a historical view of the Bible. They viewed the drama of God's redemption as a process, initiated by God in particular with Abraham, and moving forward to a climax in Jesus Christ, in whom God would conclude human history. The Old Testament with its Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants they viewed as preparatory, as paving the way, for the final and complete revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament institutions and the understanding of God and his ways and will are seen as lacking finality; they are unfinished. Men there move

¹⁶ See also the argument of Pilgram Marpeck with Martin Bucer, in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer: Elsass I. Teil, Stadt Strassburg 1522-1532*, edited by M. Krebs und H. G. Rott (Gütersloh, 1959) 416-527.

¹⁷ *Acta*, 200, 210-11, 223, 274-75, 277, 291.

¹⁸ *Acta*, 253, 259, 195.

in a world of shadow in comparison with brightness of the world in which Christ is revealed.¹⁹ It was therefore impossible for the Swiss Brethren to regard the Bible as being equally authoritative in all its parts. The earlier stands under the judgment of the later; the first word, the Old Testament, under the judgment of the last word, the New Testament.²⁰ It would be like a notice from the office of a company president which reads: "All previous directives are to be interpreted in terms of this last one."

But neither were the Swiss Brethren guilty of "Marcionism"—that is, the rejection of the Old Testament and allowing only the New Testament. The Bible did not consist for them of two separate sections, one of which was rejected *in toto* and the other accepted *in toto*. They agreed at the beginning of the debate with the clergy that the Old Testament was also the Word of God, but with the one qualification; it is valid "where Christ has not suspended it."²¹

Actually then it was not the New Testament as a book that provided the key to the Anabaptist understanding of the Old Testament, but the new Covenant or the new and final revelation of God in Christ. Christ was for them the center of Scripture. Any specific word in the Bible stands or falls depending upon whether it agrees with Jesus Christ or not. What God did in Christ is his final word to men, and therefore what Christ, who was perfectly obedient to the will of his Father, said and did, is simply God's demand. Anything which stands in opposition to Christ's word and life is not God's word for Christians even if it is in the Bible. Certainly Christ's words and life did not abrogate the whole of the Old Testament, but since in Old Testament times there was only a partial revelation the demand was not so high. There the rule of an eye for an eye was allowed because men were not able to rise higher; in Christ even such limited retaliation is forbidden. There men were allowed to divorce their wives; here it is forbidden except on one condition.

When therefore the Swiss Brethren were particular about following the demands of Christ in detail they were not being simply literalistic. In fact they openly rejected the charge of literalism for its own sake.²² It was not an extreme veneration for the Bible itself that drove them to insist that when Jesus said "Swear not at all," abstinence from every and all oaths was their only possible response. Their concern for the specific instructions of Scripture was rooted in their concept of radical obedience. If Christ completely fulfilled the will

¹⁹ *Acta*, 59, 220, 227, 228.

²⁰ *Acta*, 19.

²¹ *Acta*, 22.

²² *Acta*, 290-91.

of his Father, then what he said and did carries divine authority. How can a word of Christ be called a dead letter?²³ And who are men even to ask questions about its validity?

This concern for obedience over against an anxious preoccupation with literal words is clearly demonstrated in the discussion about the ministry which was the second article on the agenda. The clergy insisted that the Swiss Brethren church was not a church because it did not stand in the true succession from the apostles through the papal church, and therefore their ministers were not truly called. Not standing in the true succession meant that they lacked the authority of God.²⁴ The reply of the Brethren to this at first reading suggests that they had not even listened to what the clergy had been saying. But a more careful reading reveals that they had heard well enough. Their reply clearly demonstrates their use of Scripture. They did not demand proof texts which clearly stated that they were not sent. They demanded to be shown that their church was not living according to the order of Christ. It was for them clearly not a question of outward succession, for they denied that the papal church was the church, and also that the established church in Bern was the church, because these churches did not live according to the order of Christ.²⁵ The order of Christ meant for the Brethren that only those belong to the church who have repented of their sins, confessed faith in Christ, and in baptism promised obedience to him. Over and over again this is said, as for example, in the following quotations:

However, this is the church which believes in Christ that he has redeemed her to abandon the fleshly life of desire. They are disciples, members of the body of Christ, who confess a changed life. In such the Christian life and the church begins. To them the practices of the church as baptism, ban, and breaking of bread pertain and to no one else upon earth. They have confessed their sin, show repentance and sorrow for it, walk in the fruits of the Holy Spirit and are sealed with the power of the Holy Spirit.²⁶

One must act according to the rule which Christ and the apostles taught. Thus we have found our brethren; with teaching, life, faith, baptism, ban, breaking of bread. Such we recognize as Christian church, regardless of whether there be many or few.²⁷

If it could be shown, the Brethren said repeatedly, that they were not obedient to Christ, they would immediately recognize that their commission was not valid. This was the kind of argument the clergy found extremely difficult to refute and it was at another point

²³ *Acta*, 277; cf. 223.

²⁴ *Acta*, 28-29.

²⁵ *Acta*, 33, 35, 41, 44, 52, 64-66, 81, 121.

²⁶ *Acta*, 54-55.

²⁷ *Acta*, 67; cf. 30, 36, 43.

in the debate that, all other means having failed to convince the Brethren that their church was not the true church, they introduced a syllogism to end the argument:

Whoever severs himself from the true church commits the sin against the Holy Spirit.

You say that severance from your church is not the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Therefore your church is not the true church.²⁸

The Brethren, however, were not taken in by this kind of scriptural interpretation and stuck to their point about unquestioned obedience to Christ as Lord.²⁹

And this is also the answer to the claim of the clergy that faith and love be used to interpret the Scriptures rather than to insist upon the words themselves. The Brethren agreed that love is the norm, but love is precisely that which drives men to take the literal commands seriously, for to love God is precisely to obey his commandments.³⁰

Even though the insistence of the Swiss Brethren on obedience to the literal commands cannot be characterized as literalism for its own sake, the dangers inherent in their position should be clearly recognized. Among them it easily turned to legalism, and Pilgram Marpeck's correspondence with the Swiss Brethren on the subject of making precipitate judgments indicates that it had happened.³¹ Furthermore their restitutionist claims involved them in obvious contradictions. While they acknowledged having been taught by the Reformed clergy, they asserted that neither the papal church nor the Reformed church was the church.

As indicated at the beginning, this conversation was not a true debate, because the one side held the power of life and death over the other. In order that the Brethren should not forget this the clergy and council told them on Friday that if they would change their minds and accept the instruction of the clergy they would be lenient with them.³² When it appeared at the end that the Brethren had not been convinced, the discipline of the Bern church was set in motion. It never seems to have occurred to the clergy that their criticism of the unloving church discipline practices of the Brethren stood at some variance with their own practice of church discipline with respect to these Brethren. All who refused to recant, the Breth-

²⁸ *Acta*, 118.

²⁹ *Acta*, 121-22.

³⁰ *Acta*, 273.

³¹ Several letters in the *Kunstbuch* deal with the problem of making harsh, precipitate and unloving judgments on members of the brotherhood.

³² *Acta*, 224.

ren were told on Sunday morning, were to be safely conducted to the frontier and were forbidden ever again to set foot on Bernese territory. This applied to both citizens and non-citizens. If they ever returned they would be executed with the sword.³³

³³ *Acta*, 303-4.

Part II:

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF THE BIBLE IN MENNONITE HISTORY

FRITS KUIPER*

INTRODUCTION

That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. I Timothy 1:14.

The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* classifies itself as a "compendium of references with regard to the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement."¹ In this subtitle Harold Bender² interpreted his vision about the unity of the various Mennonite churches and some that are similar which have been scattered over the earth from the beginning of the sixteenth century. This vision is becoming more and more predominant among the Mennonites of all parts of the world, who began to gather together beginning with 1925 in world conferences of Mennonites.³

In this discourse I shall try to show that the understanding of the Bible was fundamental for the formation, for the survival, and, perhaps, for the rebirth of this movement which is to keep an indispensable trust for humanity.

I am aware that this discourse will not be so much the mature fruit of my research, but rather a stimulation for study by others. I believe that in the theological atmosphere of our time it should be so. The heritage of my generation will be more than anything a mandate for the future. May my thesis be understood in this way!

FIRST PROPOSITION

The key for understanding the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement⁴ is found in its special form of biblicism.

*This discourse was given November 19, 1965, after two years of teaching as visiting professor of Biblical Interpretation in the Mennonite Seminary in Montevideo.

The footnotes and the appendices were added later, but were conceived beforehand as documentation and explanation of the propositions.

The Spanish text of the address has been edited by Ernesto Suarez Vilela, and published as Pamphlet No. 2 by the Mennonite Seminary in Montevideo in 1966. It is presented here with the permission of the seminary.

1 *The Mennonite Encyclopedia I*: (hereafter cited as *ME*)

2 Harold Bender (1897-1962) was director of studies and professor of Church History in the Goshen College Biblical Seminary. He was president of the Society of Reformation Studies and of the American Association of Church History. Besides being author of *Conrad Grebel* and *The Anabaptist Vision*, he was editor of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* and of the *MQR*.

3 The first Mennonite World Conference was called in 1925 in Christian Neff, of Weierhof, Germany, in the cities of Basel and Zürich, Switzerland. Its intention was to commemorate the 4th centenary of the birth of Anabaptism (1525). The second conference took place in 1930, in Danzig; the third in 1936 in Holand. After the Second World War the Mennonite World Conference met more regularly: 1948 (U.S.); 1952 (Switzerland); 1957 (Germany); 1962 (Canada). The Eighth Conference is called for 1967 (Holland) and the ninth is planned around 1972 (Latin America). See C. J. Dyck's article in this issue of the *MQR*, "The Mennonite World Conference: A Brief Introduction."

4 As I shall discuss in detail in the following theses, I am considering January 1525 as the date of the beginning of this movement, when the first "congregation" was founded by the renewed baptism. In German (as in Dutch) often it is emphatically called "congregation" (*Gemeinde*) as opposed to "church" (*Kirche*). When we use—following Bender—the word "movement" often in this writing we are conscious of the danger that it may not be clear enough that this "movement" tried to do nothing less than to re-establish the original church in its correct form.

For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.

It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?

But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. Deuteronomy 30:11-14.

This first proposition seems almost unquestionable and irrefutable. But if we do not understand well the peculiarity of this special kind of biblicism, my proposition will not prove anything.

There are many forms of biblicism. All biblicists will declare that the basis of their concept is a personal encounter with the biblical message and, as a fruit of this, an inward experience of illumination by God. But it is not certain that they really understand the same message and have similar experiences. Although two persons may use the same spiritual words, it may be, nevertheless, that they are not speaking about the same thing. Even when they cite the same biblical texts (and in an identical version) one may find a fundamental difference. And, on the other hand, differences that seem fundamental may be of minimum importance.

History itself may be very revealing as to whether a difference was important or whether it was only insignificant. Nevertheless the interpretation of the story is never given without arbitrariness. Therefore, it will always be questionable and refutable.

However, it seems possible to me to affirm that in the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement of the sixteenth century—in spite of all the diversity—there was an essential agreement as to the manner of understanding the Bible. They were individualists but they recognized each other as brothers in the faith. Their biblicism possessed

5 I take the following notes from Dr. W. J. Kühler, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Doopsgezinden in die zestiende Eeuw* (Haarlem, 1932, 1); *idem, Geschiedenes van de Doopsgezinden in Nederland*, Vol. II (1600-1735), Part I (Haarlem, 1940: II, 1). "[In the reading of the Bible] all human wisdom was a hindrance, an annoyance" (I: 3).

"The Bible is their book with which they familiarized themselves word for word. Would that they had devoured the whole Bible." This was a disdainful allusion of one of their fiercest opponents (the Calvinist, Guido de Brez)" (I: 26). "(The martyrs) would read the Bible like children; they studied deeply not only in the Gospels and in the Sermon on the Mount, but also in the Apocalypse with its prophecies of the final judgment and of the New Jerusalem that descends from heaven. They would discuss these things point by point in their secret meetings" (I: 50).

"They bowed in humble faith before the revelation of God in the Bible. They would not admit any human authority to be interposed between this revelation and the free conscience of the sons of God. They would reject what others wanted to impose upon them as saving doctrine. They kept exclusively to the Word of God. For an interpretation of the Word they would not attribute obligatory authority to anyone. They had to follow their own judgment" (II: 71).

I owe these citations to H. W. Meihuizen, Kühler's second successor in the chair of Mennonite History in our Seminary at Amsterdam. In a personal letter of June 10, 1965, Meihuizen wrote me that, in his opinion, Kühler sometimes forgot that there was something called "Mennonite spectacles" for investigating the Bible, because there was a kind of *communis opinio anabaptistica*. With this I am in complete agreement.

a candor and a simplicity that, according to them, was normal. Nevertheless, this was not common among the Christians of that generation nor of any other generation since the apostolic age.

To them their understanding of the Bible seemed plain and clear. They blamed the difficulties and the lack of understanding on the church theologians. The gospel in itself, according to the Anabaptists, is quite clear in its revelation of the will of God. And this will of God was manifested in Jesus with a call to all men. To answer this call with the whole of his life—that was, in their opinion, the essence of the Christian faith. And in that way they would read the Bible. They would also read the Old Testament, including the books of the Apocrypha, but interpreting them according to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Also the Epistles of the New Testament were interpreted according to this gospel. The apostles were the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Anabaptists considered themselves as fellow-creatures of the disciples of Jesus at the time of his life on earth and they considered themselves similar to the prophets of Israel. As to “the book” which Ezekiel and John of Patmos had to eat (Ezek. 3:1-3; Rev. 10:9-10), they too swallowed it!

SECOND PROPOSITION

The fundamental difference with Catholicism and the Reformation was shown primarily in their concept of the Church.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:25-27.

I do not deny the importance that spiritual movements before the Anabaptist movement may have had for the Anabaptists. But I adopt the view of our historians in regard to the administration of the new baptism by Conrad Grebel and George Blaurock at the end of 1525 in Zürich⁶ as the point of departure.

This event confirmed the rupture between Grebel and his partisans on the one hand, and Zwingli on the other. The differences between them had been aggravated during the two previous years. This rupture was tragic because they loved each other respectively as disciples and teacher in biblical studies. But the conflict was not

⁶ See in *ME* and *ML* for the articles on these two men. The description that impressed me most was that of Fritz Blanke of Zürich in his *Brüder in Christo*.

a result of an error nor of occasional incidents.⁷ Also the supposition that the Anabaptists had “acted ahead of their time” seems to me to be inaccurate.⁸ At least even in our century and in the foreseeable future the Anabaptist vision of the church is and will be unacceptable to the great majority of Catholics and Protestants.

For the Anabaptists the church was not only a congregation of believers as it was for various movements of the centuries after the Reformation. For them it was nothing less than the renewal of the church of the New Testament. The new baptism expressed clearly their conviction that neither the papal church nor the church of the canton of Zürich was the continuation of the original church. Both were, in their view, not simply imperfect, but false churches.⁹

This was in accord with their understanding of the New Testament. For them the discipleship of Jesus constituted the church. Baptism could only be a sign of the unity between Master and disciple. Therefore, baptism of persons not conscious of its meaning for them was not a baptism, but a blasphemy.

For those of us who are heirs of the Anabaptist tradition it might be desirable to criticize our own Mennonite churches today. These have often departed far from the original Mennonite vision. Especially at a time when the ecumenical movement is of prime importance, may the Mennonites pursue the ideal of the true church. The messianic body of the New Testament was in the center of the Anabaptist concept. They were convinced that this body had been lost, at least after the third century. And I think they were right.¹⁰

7 This conflict has been very well understood by John Howard Yoder. See for example, these citations of his article on Zwingli in *ME*: “Zwingli reports [June 1525, in the Municipal Council of Zürich] that the Anabaptists are self-called and claim a private possession of the Holy Spirit mediated neither by Scripture nor by the church” (p. 1053). Who is right? Zwingli or the Anabaptists who accuse Zwingli of betraying the cause? The answer “depends on the significance attributed to the ‘turning point’ in mid-December 1523, when Zwingli took a position which he had said a week earlier would make him ‘guilty of lying before the Word of God’ ” (p. 1054).

8 See the article “Discipleship,” by Bender (*ME* 4:1076): “The two Reformation movements, Lutheranism and Anabaptism, with their differing ideological foci, were consciously in opposition to each other. . . . The two positions, purified of their extremes and misunderstandings, are not in necessary conflict, but should be complementary parts of a full New Testament Christianity.”

In my opinion, the Lutheran emphasis could have and ought to have been accepted as a “complementary part” in the Anabaptist theology without, therefore, tearing it from its foundations. But a “complementary” Anabaptist part in a Lutheran theology would be incompatible and irreconcilable, at least with the Lutheran concept of the two kingdoms. And this concept is closely linked to the Lutheran vision of the “hidden God” that cannot be understood by the revelation of his love. I think that it would turn out much more difficult for the Lutheran theologians than for their Calvinist colleagues to extricate themselves completely from their national and political traditions. At least, a theology like that of the Calvinist Karl Barth, who drew nearer and nearer to the central ideas of the Anabaptists, is not easily found in the Lutheran atmosphere. On Dietrich Bonhöffer, see my notes 14, 46 and 47.

9 Note the title of the book by H. W. Meihuizen: *Menno Simons ijveraar voor het herstel van de nieuwtestamentische gemeente* (Menno Simons, Zealous to Restore the New Testament Church) (Haarlem, 1961). It may be that Menno Simons was more conscious of the trend of the work, but the Swiss Anabaptists went in the same direction.

10 Mennonites generally vacillate in face of ecumenical movement. The “Doopsgezinden” in Holland affiliated from the beginning, but give emphasis to their objections to the confessional character which could be attributed to the basic formula of the World Council of Churches. Nevertheless they discovered their collaboration in the movement as a Christian duty.

Many think it sufficient to join a group of believers in order to establish "a" church. Such a church, nevertheless, cannot represent the unique church in the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3), the community of all the disciples of Christ Jesus, without being linked closely in the faith with all the chosen of God throughout human history.

THIRD PROPOSITION

That difference was related to another experience of faith and it had to result in another kind of theology.

As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me: but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols.

For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord God, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. Ezekiel 20:39-40.

John A. Mackay, when he visited Uruguay in 1964, said that at present the church is too much studied and Jesus Christ is not studied enough. It is certain that an excessive attention paid to the church may prejudice its own end. The church must serve Christ, since in itself it has no value. Nevertheless, the ecclesiastical actions and opinions demonstrate a great deal about the faith of its members.¹¹

¹¹ See in *Rincón Teológico*, a magazine of the Evangelical Mennonite Theological Seminary, No. 7 (July-August 1964), my observations on my meeting with John A. Mackay. I cite from this article: "His Christology, which I look upon as the key to all his ideas, insisted on four points: (1). God was incarnated in humanity. That is why the wise men acknowledged that "our kingdom has ended," and the shepherds "our kingdom is to begin." (2) Jesus was a true man, tried by the tempter in the desert. He was not the "practical" man nor the "popular" man nor the "politician" that the world is looking for. (3) He accepted being a "servant" even among his own; the "apostolic succession," for example, was not important. Jesus was rejected and crucified as the Great Solitaire. He died to create a new humanity (here Mackay underscored the danger that in Spanish Christianity there is a lack of representing the risen Christ). (4) Where the resurrection of Christ is not understood, there the church runs the danger of falling into self-sufficiency. In Spain the church often took the place of God. In South America there was the same danger. But today, according to Mackay, there is in this part of the world a Roman ecclesiastical movement which points to a new course. The great Spanish mystics had longed for something more than the eucharist to satisfy the church.

In the first place, *Christ Jesus is God incarnate*. The word "God" is used, even after more than 2000 years, in the translation of the Bible. God is the God of Moses and of the prophets, the God and Father of Jesus and his apostles. But also God is a designation for all the religious concepts of man. Not only the ancient and primitive gentiles have their gods; many modern currents also form ideas of God for themselves. And it is not proper to consider Jesus as the incarnation of these vague and indefinite ideas, that is to say, without sufficient knowledge of the Old Testament one cannot understand the message of Christ Jesus as God incarnate.

In the second place: The true man is not the popular type of today. Of course, Jesus will have no probability of being elected president, or acclaimed as a leader. Jesus must be, however, accepted again in our times as the guide of our life. Mackay said that in the church of Christ there is room for many denominations, just as in the Roman Church one finds hundreds of religious orders. But are contradictory concepts permitted? In our time one finds in the church, among other things, these two convictions: (a) Jesus is the sovereign of the free world and its commander in the fight against communist slavery. (b) Jesus is the Prince of Peace and the Reconciler of all national and international parties. Can both concepts be just at the same time? I think the church cannot be loyal to its Lord without choosing.

It is said, and with reason, that Luther's interior struggle to find the grace of God was related to his education in the medieval church. Samuel Cramer, in his introduction to the history of the Anabaptist martyrs, shows that these were so far from that church that they had no personal relation with it in their experiences.¹² For Luther, to whom Zwingli looked for an ecclesiastical union, it was, for that reason, a matter of the reform of the existent church. But for the Anabaptists, this church was merely one of the forms of the world and one had to find God and his Christ outside it.

The first Swiss Anabaptists died before they could develop their theological concepts.¹³ Nevertheless, Menno Simons was able to do it, although only in substance and in controversial form. It is worth remembering that Menno put a great emphasis on his ideas about the Incarnation. And in spite of the fact that these opinions were related to the false medical and biological concepts of that time, Menno's theological purpose is of highest importance. His efforts do not principally tend to assure God's pardon but rather to clarify the possibility of the new creation. Jesus was the second and the new Adam, the renewed man. His church was the true *ekklesia* to which God called man to separate from the present world as a sign of the world to come.¹⁴

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should shew forth the praises of

12 See *Het Offer des Heeren* edited by S. Cramer ('s Gravenhage, 1904; Bibliotheka Reformatoria Neerlandica II, cited as *BRN* II).

Cramer, predecessor of Kühler in the chair of Mennonite History in Amsterdam, discusses the great difference in temperament, character and culture of the Anabaptist martyrs. Afterwards he says, "But all are correlative, with the other, totally and completely." Because of love in their hearts they changed their lives, they carried the cross of the Lord, they searched intently for his kingdom. On the question of the teachings and consolations of all with the Roman church and its doctrines they have nothing to do. That for them remained far in the past. That is "the world" that pursues them. They, nevertheless, "are transplanted in the new life without choice". . . . Yes, the title was justified: They themselves were the Sacrifice of the Lord (i.e., Christ) in their time!

13 On the theology of Menno Simons, J. A. Oosterbaan gave a notable address at a commemoration of the anniversary of Menno's death (1561) in Amsterdam, January 29, 1961. This discourse was published in *Nederlands Theologisch Tydschrift*, and in an English translation in *MQR* 35:187-96.

Oosterbaan compares the theology of Menno with that of Karl Barth and examines its very special significance. According to Oosterbaan, Menno's theology was superior to that of Luther and that of Calvin (p. 190). Bender, in his editorial which precedes it (p. 186), said: "Menno has genuine stature among sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers even though he cannot be classed among the greatest." Why such an undervaluation? Personally, in general I am in agreement with Oosterbaan, but not with his affirmation that the pneumatocentric tendency could provide a foundation of equal value for a completely biblical Anabaptist theology. For such a theology, in my opinion, the Holy Spirit has to be subordinated to the Father and to the Son, whereas he possesses equal value and dignity.

On Menno's theology see also the article by William Keeney in *A Legacy of Faith: the Heritage of Menno Simons* by C. J. Dyck *et al.* (Newton, 1962), 55-68.

14 The notable and extensive letter which Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote on April 30, 1944, published in *Widerstand und Ergebung* (München, 1952; cited as *WE*), seems to me to express very modern ideas which have a spiritual affinity with those of the Anabaptists. For example, these words manifest an Anabaptist idea: "Christ, then, no longer is the object of religion, but totally something else. Truly he is the master of the world (*WE*, p. 180). (See the end of my footnote 8 and also footnotes 46 and 47.)

him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9).

FOURTH PROPOSITION

The Anabaptist concept of the church had preponderant importance because of its criticism of the corpus christianum.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. Romans 12:1-2.

The *corpus christianum* is a biblical concept. The Epistle to the Ephesians, especially, deals with it as the union which, through the work of Christ Jesus, can be brought about among Jews and Gentiles.

After the fourth century, when Christianity became the state religion and the state received religious sanction, the idea of the *corpus christianum* changed. From then on, European society as such was identified with the *corpus christianum*. At present, it is increasingly recognized that this identification is false. Also today the conviction is spread everywhere that this fusion of the world of then with the gospel is no longer tenable. But in the sixteenth century the situation was different.¹⁵ Zwingli, like Luther, retained the *corpus christianum* concept, asking for harmony between the church and the state.¹⁶ The church therefore had importance for the inner life, and only in an indirect way for practical daily life. On this point the Anabaptists distinguished themselves from Zwingli and from the other Reformers. For them the life of the believer changes in such a way that its relation with the neighbor also takes other forms. For Conrad Grebel and his friends the community of believers had primordial importance even before their church was established by the new baptism.¹⁷

¹⁵ Hans Keescooper, a Dutch martyr, wrote a letter to his brethren in 1550 before being burned at the stake. In it, referring to the trial, he said, “It was told to the Court that all their learned churchmen should appear in court. Then it would be demonstrated that they are all false prophets and that for almost 1300 years they deceived the world with their falsification” (*BRN*, II: 122). In a note S. Cramer says that these “almost 1300 years” indicate the time since Constantine. But when the martyr made his declaration only 1237 years had passed since the decree of Constantine, which made Christianity a permitted religion (AD 313). Thus, according to Keescooper, the learned churchmen began “their falsifications” more than two generations before the beginning of the Constantinian era. May he have been right?

¹⁶ Zwingli in his *Commentary on the True Religion and the False Religion* (March, 1525), in the paragraph on government says: “Because the Spirit of Christ possesses what the state greatly lacks, there can be nothing more fortunate for the state than such love as the gospel furnishes, and thus it is clear that the state will be founded and firmly consecrated when good hearts unite with good laws.” Cited from *Huldreich Zwingli, Auswahl seiner Schriften*, ed. E. Künzli (Zürich and Stuttgart, 1962) p. 238 (cited as *Auswahl*).

¹⁷ Cornelius Krahn, of the Bethel College Historical Library, sent me a photocopy of the text of this very notable letter as it is printed in H. Boehmer/P. Kirn: *Thomas Müntzers Briefwechsel* (Leipzig, 1931), 92-101. In Appendix A of the Spanish edition we reproduced five citations from this letter.

Where the grace of God unites men as brothers in the faith, there truly is revealed the body of Christ. Then it becomes manifest that the common society is not the *corpus christianum*. To use this name or to think only in that direction is hypocrisy. The *corpus christianum* ought to point to the new world, the world established in its rightful form.

The church is the place where the love of God reigns. She must transform the world. The world in its present state loses its only hope when it is identified with the *corpus christianum*. Only when it has in its midst a community with another structure—with the structure of the new creation—can the world itself be transformed. The Anabaptists, nevertheless, criticized the world because of love and not out of scorn.¹⁸ They understood that God loved the world (John 3:17).

FIFTH PROPOSITION

As a consequence of this criticism the Anabaptists understood the deep wants of the needy of their time.

Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his works;

That saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is cieled with cedar, and painted with vermillion.

Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him?

He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him; was not this to know me? saith the Lord.

But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. Jeremiah 22:13-17.

The relation between the Anabaptist movement and the social and political agitations of the sixteenth century is a very controversial subject. It is understandable that our Mennonite historians wanted to deny any responsibility of [the Anabaptist] biblical-religious movement with its peaceful tolerance for these revolutionary agitations. The records and events are quite clearly in their favor. The accusations of the government and Catholic and Protestant scholars against our forefathers were completely false. Some of the accusers knew that they were slandering the Anabaptists and others may also have known it.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Calvin *Contra los Anabaptistas*, *Opera VII*, p. 103. There Calvin wrongly accuses the Anabaptists of having an affinity with Marcion (cited by J. A. Oosterbaan in his discourse mentioned in note 13).

¹⁹ See, for example, Zwingli's book of 1552. *Against the Cunning of the Anabaptists*. In Appendix C, Spanish edition, we give some citations. We have the impression that Zwingli was convinced that he had to slander in this way.

But each change in the ecclesiastical structure had to influence social and political affairs. And a criticism as basic as that of the Anabaptists with regard to the sanctity of the politico-social order was, in the nature of the case, unacceptable to the regents of the church and the state. At the same time it is good to realize that our movement was able to begin and to maintain itself in a society which in that century was profoundly changing. It may be said that these very circumstances made the movement possible and at the same time dangerous.²⁰

Thomas Müntzer was not an Anabaptist.²¹ And Conrad Grebel and his friends had rejected beforehand all of Müntzer's proposals for the approval of violent methods. But the fathers of the Anabaptist movement were able to understand the great religious and biblical zeal of the uprising of the peasants that Müntzer favored.²² The tone of the very notable letter which Grebel and his friends wrote to Müntzer in September 1524 (when the revolutionary disturbances of south Germany had already begun) seems to me convincing proof of that understanding. The fact that two of Müntzer's intimate friends, Hans Hut and Martin Rinck, were later among the leaders of the Anabaptist movement seems to me even more suggestive.²³

The court trial (1527) against Michael Sattler (one of the first martyrs of our movement), who preferred the Turks to the papists, shows a complete rupture with the political foundations of existent society.²⁴ He also rejected all violence, but declared that if he had

20 Not only Marxist historians have seen a relation between the social change of the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Reformation. There is a correlation between all factors of natural and spiritual life in the history of humanity. Listening to the message of the Bible, we Christians ought to search for the understanding of history in its consecutive epochs. Even today this task has not been undertaken with sufficient vigor.

21 On Müntzer, see the articles in *ME* and *ML* and our Appendices A and B in the Spanish edition. Let us cite the end of the article by Christian Hege in *ML*:

Sebastian Franck in 1531, says of the Anabaptists in his *Chronica*: "They are unanimous in their doctrines. They obey the authorities in everything that is not contrary to God's law. Not only do they pay interest and taxes but also they hand over the coat and the cloak and even of what they may not have wanted to deprive themselves. They say that they are ready to suffer violence and even to obey tyrants. All those with whom I have spoken have answered that they are willing to suffer patiently in the name of Jesus and not to fight impatiently. Because the Gospel teaches us not to use physical force, as the peasants wanted to do, but to be strengthened and protected by means of suffering and death."

Oosterbaan indicates that there is a relation between Müntzer's and Menno's theological thought (*MQR* 35:191).

J. L. Hromadka, in his book *Das Evangelium auf dem Wege zum Menschen* (Berlin, 1960), proclaims his solidarity with the Anabaptists in the eschatological expectation (p. 272). This information my friend and Mennonite brother A. J. Koejemans, who was formerly editor of the Communist paper of Amsterdam, gave me. Probably Hromadka is referring to Müntzer and other radical reformers among the Anabaptists. It would be better to count the Anabaptists among the radical reformers, since they were among them, rather than the reverse, since Müntzer and his partisans do not belong to the Anabaptist group.

22 See on this insurrection the citations of contemporary sources published by W. Wibel in 1925, *Martin Luther und der Bauernkrieg* (Neuwerkverlag Schlüchtern/Habertshof) in Appendix B (Spanish edition).

23 The citations from the letter to Müntzer are found in Appendix A, Spanish edition. Concerning Hans Hut and Martin Rinck, see the articles in *ML* and *ME*.

been permitted to use violence he would have used it more happily in favor of the Turks than in favor of the papists.²⁵ Anyone who talks like that can understand the profound disgust of the needy of his time. Personally, Sattler—as almost all the Anabaptist leaders—did not come from the lower classes, but was with them, as was the whole Anabaptist movement, against those who were oppressing them. The Anabaptist fathers recognized that the Son of David, who would judge the afflictions of the people, would save the sons of the needy and destroy the oppressor (Psalms 72:4).²⁶

The Anabaptists themselves were threatened by total eradication. Therefore they understood, better than others, the misery of all the oppressed.

SIXTH PROPOSITION

The Mennonites who escaped annihilation tried to remain with the Bible and survive as part of the people of God.

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:15.

To divide history into periods is always arbitrary. The clearest example of such arbitrariness is seen in the non-Jewish historians who do not recognize in Judaism of postbiblical times the direct succession of the people of Moses and the prophets.²⁷ But in our case, speaking of Anabaptist- Mennonite history, it seems to me that a division between the time of the martyrs and the later time can be justified. Nevertheless, this later period has not lacked intimate relations with the time of the martyrs.

This second period of our history may be called the “Mennonite” period, differentiating from the “Anabaptist” period. But even

24 In 1562 ff. the Dutch Anabaptists included the account of the martyrdom of Michael Sattler in their martyr books, placing it immediately after the martyrdom of Stephen and before that of the Anabaptist martyrs of the Low Countries after 1527 (*BRN*, II: 17).

25 After 1568 the Dutch insurgents, in their fight against the government of Philip II of Spain, used the motto “Liever Turks dan Paaps!” (“Rather Turkish than Popish!”). Already in 1560 a pamphlet on Michael Sattler was translated into Dutch.

26 On the attitude of the peaceful Anabaptists in face of the revolutionaries, see also the writing of Menno Simons against Jan van Leyden published at the end of his complete works (Amsterdam, 1681, and translations in German and English). Menno vigorously rejects the violent methods of Jan van Leyden and his adoption of the title “King of Zion.” But the tone is completely different from that of Luther against Thomas Müntzer.

Heinhold Fast, of Emden, published a book in detail on the left wing of the Reformation, *Der linke Flügel der Reformation* (Bremen, 1962). It seems to me that Fast, like several other Mennonite historians before, made too great a difference between Melchior Hofmann—through whom the movement came to the Low Countries—and the first Anabaptists of Switzerland and South Germany. But I did not have the opportunity to study Fast’s book carefully.

27 This arbitrariness I found, for example, in the writings of the very well-known historian A. J. Toynbee. The fact that some Jewish groups accept also such a view only proves that they do not understand the biblical message, neither of the Old nor of the New Testament.

so, we ought not to forget that Menno Simons himself belongs completely to the "Anabaptist" period.²⁸ The "Mennonite" period shows the same characteristics as the "Anabaptist" period, but in different proportions. The heroism of the Mennonite families who emigrated as far as eastern Siberia and western Canada and the center of Latin America was different from the heroism of the martyrs. But it was the same biblical spirit of perseverance that encouraged both.

Just like their Anabaptist fathers, the Mennonites were non-conformists. Their influence on other groups has been very great. We ought to remember that the Baptists had their origin in the same spiritual atmosphere of the Mennonites, in Amsterdam.²⁹ Besides, one can say—with the exception of the Waldensians³⁰—all the free churches followed the Anabaptist-Mennonite example. This is related not only to their independence from the state but also to their ideal of living "in" the world but not "as" the world.³¹

Repeatedly they approached very closely the atmosphere which surrounded them, especially in Holland where the Mennonites had been the first important group of the Reformation. The influences of various spiritual currents in the religious life of their nation (it bears a Calvinist stamp and has a humanist tendency) were deep. Nevertheless, the biblicism of Galenus Abrahamsz, their chief theologian at the end of the seventeenth century, was very typical of the Mennonite tradition. In contrast with the "Friends" (Quakers) he

28 E. G. Leonard, in his *General History of Protestantism (Histoire Generale du protestantisme)*; Paris; I, 1961 II, 1961; III,?) speaks of Menno Simons (who died in 1561) only in his Volume II where he discusses the establishment of the Reformation during the years 1564-1700. Nevertheless, Calvin—who was born more than ten years after Menno—is discussed in Volume I. Not only in the Low Countries but in all of Europe the Anabaptist movement precedes Calvinism.

29 John Smyth, an English Protestant fugitive, given refuge in Holland, baptized himself in Amsterdam at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Afterward he tried to affiliate, with those he had baptized, with one of the Mennonite churches of Amsterdam. This affiliation was not brought about until after much negotiation and after Smyth's death. Meanwhile, a group of his followers returned to England. There his church changed the form of baptism from sprinkling and to immersion. Thus began the English Baptist movement in the mid-seventeenth century. This movement has grown to become one of the largest church groups in the world. In 1948 representatives of various Baptist denominations of many races and cultures gathered in the Mennonite Church of Amsterdam to commemorate the initial steps taken there by John Smyth.

30 Mennonite historians have tried at various times to discover historical relations with the Waldensians, but they were not successful. When I was preparing this discourse, our student Roberto Maria Elmassian told me that several historians of his Armenian Church affirm that the Waldensians as well as the Anabaptists and other Reformation movements received a strong stimulus from the descendants of Armenian fugitives, "the Paulists," during the seventh to the twelfth centuries.

31 The theologian, philosopher, and historian Ernst Troeltsch, in his great book on the social doctrines of the Christian churches, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Leipzig, 1913), showed the importance of the social attitude of groups like the Anabaptists and Mennonites. Troeltsch and the sociologist Max Weber use the formula "asceticism within the world" (innerweltliche Askese), different from the monks who practice asceticism outside the world. Weber, in his studies on the sociology of the religions of the world, showed that in Holland in the nineteenth century conservative Calvinist groups imitated the Mennonite way of living in the time of the Reformation. (See *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Leipzig, 1920.)

emphasized the need of a biblical foundation for every form of spiritualism worthy of being accepted by Christians.³²

From the beginning of the eighteenth century the influence of pietism was profoundly felt in the Mennonite churches in several regions of Europe. In the middle of the eighteenth century a mob broke the windows of the home of the Mennonite pastor Deknatel, in Amsterdam, because in his preaching he insisted too strongly on conversion.³³ A century later the pietistic Dutch pastor Jan de Liefde left the Mennonite church of Holland because he felt that the church was too weak and insipid. Nevertheless, the same de Liefde—who had done a great evangelizing work in Holland, Germany, and England—continued in the Anabaptist-Mennonite line.³⁴ Also the modernists among the Mennonites wanted, in general, to be faithful to the Bible.

The pietistic influence within the Mennonite churches in Germany, in Russia, and in North America has probably been even deeper than in Holland. The most memorable result of this influence was that it split several Mennonite churches. For example, in Russia, after 1860 one finds the “Mennonite Brethren” beside the Mennonite “Church.” However, the “Mennonite Brethren” maintained themselves as Mennonites and that not only for economic reasons.

Mennonite perseverance in its will to survive as a group cannot be understood in any other way than as an imitation of the people of God, of the Old Testament. For more than four centuries of their history, the Mennonites experienced a call to survive which has no parallel except in the Jews. Therefore others asked themselves, “Are Mennonites truly ‘Christians?’” I answer: On the contrary—their history as a tribe of the people of the God of the Bible made it easier for them to understand Jesus and his apostles.

SEVENTH PROPOSITION

Today we Mennonites must renew our biblicism especially as a testimony to universal peace.

32 H. W. Meihuizen (see notes 5 and 9) published an interesting book on Galenus Abrahamsz, as a contender in favor of absolute tolerance and defender of Anabaptist spiritualism (*Galenus Abrahamsz 1622-1706*; Haarlem, 1955). In my opinion, in tolerance as well as in spiritualism, Galenus was more of a biblicist than Meihuizen has shown.

33 This incident in the life of Johannes Deknatel was recorded in the diary of a contemporary Jew who knew nothing about the conflict among the evangelical Christians of Amsterdam. L. Fuks published parts of this diary in one of the last yearbooks of the historical Association *Amstelodamun*.

34 Concerning Jan de Liefde and his conflict with the Dutch Mennonites of the nineteenth century, I wrote an essay, *The Discordant Voice of Jan de Liefde*, which forms part of the book *A Legacy of Faith* (pp. 158-68) mentioned in note 13. On the same matter a year earlier I published *Twee dienaars van een Heer* (Amsterdam, 1961). De Liefde may be considered a precursor of W. Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Luke 2:13-14.

The most important event for the Mennonites of our century has been without doubt the confrontation with Russian communism.³⁷ Since then has developed the International work of MCC (Mennonite Central Committee)³⁸ and without this confrontation the World Conference of Mennonites never would have become more than the gathering of a big family. Bolshevism was the great call; in the first place for Mennonites of Russia, and together with them, for the Mennonites of Europe and America and by means of these also for the churches which were born as a result of the work of missions.

In our century the social problems of the world have confronted all the Christian churches.³⁹ The great majority discovered late in our century that the Constantinian era has come to an end. We Mennonites forgot that we proclaimed this end more than four centuries ago. In our view, the *corpus christianum* never has been true. Therefore our Anabaptist message, proved by Mennonite history—in spite of all our repeated apostasies!—is today, in the midst of the history of mankind, more important than ever.⁴⁰

Our message is nothing more and nothing less than a fundamental historical biblicism.⁴¹ We are not antidogmatic nor adogmatic in the sense of not being able to accept dogmas because they may not be adequate to our philosophical and ideological concepts. No; but we want the dogmas to undergo proof from the Bible; and this

35 The "Mennonite Brethren" asked and received from the Russian government the same rights and social privileges as the others. But when they emigrated in various groups to different parts of the Americas, they held tenaciously to the name of Mennonites.

36 When, last May, I talked about our history with the director of the conservative Jewish Seminary in Buenos Aires, he was much impressed by the similarities between the history of the Mennonites and that of various Jewish groups.

37 Fritz Lieb wrote on Russian communism the most basic essays from the Protestant point of view. Benjamin Unruh (see ME) pointed Lieb out to me already in 1928. Several of the best studies by Lieb are found in his book *Sophia und Historia* (Zürich, 1962).

38 The MCC began its work after the Bolshevik Revolution to help the Russian Mennonites. These (according to the "Red Dean" of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson) suffered more than any other group of Christians in the Soviet Union. When the international situation made the continuation of its work impossible, the MCC gradually assumed more and more responsibilities to express in a practical way the Mennonite conviction of the Christian testimony.

39 My compatriot, Arend Th. Van Leeuwen, published a very important book on the part which Christianity played in universal history (*Christianity in World History*, London, 1964). I feel that I am more and more in agreement with his conclusions.

40 The World Council of Churches organized at the same time in various parts of the world a study on the "finality of Jesus Christ in the epoch of world history." I had the privilege of participating occasionally in discussions on this subject in the center of an ecumenical study group in the Rio Plata region.

41 This "fundamental historical Mennonite biblicism" is no less positive or severe than any other form of "biblicism" or "fundamentalism." Nor is it modernist in the sense of wanting to adapt the biblical concepts to the spirit of the twentieth century. On the contrary, we want to see the totality of the personal and social life in the whole world of the past, present, and future in the light of the whole Bible. This Bible we are to study with all the resources at our disposal.

not with some isolated texts but with the while of the biblical message.

Three points seem to me of vital importance. In the first place: We have to remove the mask from the economic, political and cultural powers of society.⁴² In the second place: We have to affirm the positive value of human life, without deifying it.⁴³ In the third place: We should translate the biblical testimony of peace at the center of the world situation of our century.⁴⁴

The third point includes the first two. We are not principally called to keep the equilibrium, always in danger, among the existing powers. In Christ Jesus there is no place for powers that want to be autonomous, for powers of a political or economic character, nor for powers of race or culture. All must be subordinated to the God of the Bible and—for his love—to one another.⁴⁵ To give the testimony of peace seriously is to open the road for encounter, conversation and, sometimes, for collaboration not only with Christians of other denominations but also with idealists outside the church.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Turn thou us unto thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. Lamentations 5:21.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite movement may be characterized as a grouping of laymen. All its members are priests and prophets, and it may also be said that all are ministers. But it seems better to me to give emphasis to the lay character. It is not true that the Gospel has a theological sense which must be interpreted afterward into common life.⁴⁷ Especially my compatriot, the theologian and missionary

42 It is clear that communism also wears such a mask. It may be said that we ought to combat it because it is a false religion rather than because it has no religion.

43 Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) will remain for our century an example of a practical interpretation of the Christian message in the contemporary world.

44 I think it is our duty as Mennonites to co-operate with the Christian Peace Conference of Prague. Such a co-operation must be made without forgetting our point of biblical departure or the experiences of our history; but both must be introduced in the deliberations.

45 During the first World Mennonite Conference (June 13 to 16, 1925), H. J. Krehbiel, who was then the only North American representative, gave a speech, the conclusion of which we insert in Appendix D of the Spanish edition. (See also the address in *Bericht über die 400-jährige Jubiläumsfeier der Mennoniten* [Karlsruhe, 1925] 62-64. This discourse was not approved by the majority of the Mennonites of western Europe who were present at the conference. Nevertheless, the cause of world peace was put as the order of the day in a new form among the Mennonites.

In the United States the Mennonite, Paul Peachy, Secretary of the Church Peace Mission in Washington, D. C., published the book *Biblical Realism Confronts the Nation* (1963, distributed by Herald Press, Scottdale).

46 Bonhöffer gave a pacifist message of great importance on August 28, 1934, in his speech at the Ecumenical Conference of Fanö (Denmark) on the "Church and the Peoples of the World" (*Kirche und Völkerwelt*). See appendix.

I do not think that Bonhöffer ever wished to revoke this testimony. It is very significant that in 1935 he had planned to go to India to meet Gandhi.

47 On this point Bonhöffer criticised Karl Barth whom, nevertheless, he considered the most important theologian of our century. In his letter of June 8, 1944, he wrote: ". . . in the nonreligious interpretation of theological ideas he did not give concrete orientation" (*WE*, p. 219).

Hendrik Kraemer (died in 1965), showed me that by his entire life. The whole Bible must speak in the midst of the total of human life. Above all, the preaching of the "Word made flesh" excludes all secrecy.

We may be a church that is renewing itself. The history of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement for 440 years in practically all parts of the world and among all human races offers the opportunity of a living tradition.⁴⁸ The "new members," that is to say, those who have not had a Mennonite upbringing, perhaps understand better the value of tradition.⁴⁹ But the "sons of Mennonites" have the duty, together with them, of renewing the connections with our origin.

With the Bible we have to see this origin as linked with the beginning of human life. If in Abel we see the first martyr of biblical faith, we should also see as our brothers those who are prone to follow the example of Cain. We are living within human history. We ought to live in solidarity with all other human beings imitating Jesus who gave himself for all. We ought to take seriously our life in history, so much the more because we know that not only our individual life, but also all human life may come to an end. Let us be ready for a possibly short time until fulfillment as well as for a possible continuation for many years or centuries.⁵⁰

I believe that no "theologian" can give such a concrete orientation from his studies or from his university lecture room, since he cannot explain what the "lay" believers *do*. Bonhöffer himself gave his life in the political resistance against the Hitler regime which he considered a diabolical force. He did not lack the sympathy of many believers but indeed he lacked the support of a committed church. Note here the difference with the martyrs of the church of the first century and with the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century.

I am convinced that Bonhöffer's plan for seeking instruction in the *Ashram* of Gandhi (see the last part of note 46) was related to this desire for a truly Christian testimony in our century. That Barth did not understand anything of this desire is shown in his letter of October 14, 1936, in which he refers to "the strange information that you proposed to go to India to get-through Gandhi or some other friend of God in India—a special technique. Surely you would expect great things from the application of such a technique here in the west!" (GS, II: 288).

48 Richard McKenna, of the Evangelical Theological Faculty of Buenos Aires, presented a very interesting "vision" on the importance of the presence of the Mennonites in Latin America. He expressed his ideas on August 12 and 13, 1965, in a series of four speeches in our Seminary especially for the preachers and workers of the Mennonite churches of Uruguay. As Appendix F (in the Spanish edition) we publish the four theses of his vision. We hope that his ideas may be published in fuller form. McKenna perceived spiritual relationships between the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century and the Pentecostals of our time. I asked myself if the relationship with the Jehovah's Witnesses is not even more evident.

49 Among the "new" Mennonites the Negro minister, Vincent Harding, whom I met at the Seventh Mennonite World Conference (1962), impressed me especially. He has discovered very clearly the importance of the original position of Anabaptism and he declared to me that never in the years past did he make an appeal for this in our churches without obtaining results. Besides, Harding understands the great development of the movement of the Black Muslims in the United States as a punishment for our Christian churches. He asked me, "Were we not deserving such a thing?" Of another "new" Mennonite, Robert Friedmann, of Jewish origin, I shall speak in the following note.

50 My last note should discuss eschatology in our movement. In his article on "Discipleship," which I cited in note 8, Bender says that the Anabaptists "realized that their stand meant a break with the continuity of the past "Christian" social order, the *corpus christianum*, and they consciously took this step. They had a strong sense of history and of God at work in it, and hence also of eschatology" (ME 4:1076). In relation to this he mentions that Ethelbert Stauffer spoke of a "theology of martyrdom" but that he (Bender) preferred to speak of a "theology of victory."

Today is for me the hour of putting an end to my teaching of biblical interpretation in this seminary and to all my regular ministry in our community. May the students and teachers of this school continue in the way of the truth of the biblical Gospel.

Next to Bender I want to cite his intimate collaborator Robert Friedmann who published a declaration in *The Mennonite* (Newton, September 21, 1965, pp. 592-93) on the eschatological dimension. He says among other things: "No historical vision is involved in the life of Christians nowadays, and no call to work on God's Kingdom in the concrete sense of that word. . . . Eschatology means facing the great cataclysmic turn in history—nobody knows its hour but the Father. Yet the disciple has to be on the alert and ready, and must not get sleepy or take it easy. Today, tomorrow, at any time may come that turn (and I am afraid we are always in the midst of it!) and the Christian has to know where his allegiance belongs. . . . In brief, the eschatological dimension enters our mind only as a quality of an existential faith. To gain it, let us not despair and likewise not be complacent, but let us pray *Veni Creator Spiritus* (Come, Creator Spirit!)"

To understand, thus, the eschatological language, without ceasing to think about "all that is true, all that is honest, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovable" (as Paul taught in Philippians 4:8), behold this as the calling of the Mennonite church in our century.

APPENDIX

THE CHURCH AND PEOPLES OF THE WORLD⁵¹

"I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints" (Psalm 85:8). Between the twin crags of nationalism and internationalism, ecumenical Christendom calls upon her Lord to ask his guidance. Nationalism and internationalism have to do with political necessities and possibilities. The ecumenical church, however, does not concern itself with these things, but with the commandments of God, and regardless of consequences it transmits these commandments to the world.

Our tasks as theologians, accordingly, consist only in accepting this commandment as a binding one, not as a question open to discussion. Peace on earth is not a problem, but a commandment given at Christ's coming. There are two ways of reacting to this command from God: the unconditional, blind obedience of action, or the hypocritical question of the Serpent, "Yea, hath God said. . . ? This question is the mortal enemy of obedience, and therefore the mortal enemy of all real peace. Hath God not said? Has God not understood human nature well enough to know that wars must occur in this world, like laws of nature? Must God not really have meant that we should talk about peace, to be sure, but that it is not to be literally translated into action? Must God not really have said that we should work for peace, of course, but also make ready tanks and poison gas for security?" And then perhaps the most serious question: "Did God say 'You should not protect your own people? Did God say you should leave your own a prey to the enemy?'"

No, God did not say all that. What he has said, is that there shall be peace among men—that we shall obey him without further question, that is what he means. He who questions the commandment of God before obeying has already denied him.

51 From Dietrich Bonhöffer, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Munich, 1958) 216-17.

AMERICAN MENNONITES AND THE BIBLE, 1750-1950

C. NORMAN KRAUS

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1900's a small but extremely significant group of emerging leaders in the Mennonite Church allied themselves theologically with the cause of Fundamentalism and for a generation guided the denomination in that theological direction. This loose alliance introduced into the Mennonite tradition a strain of religious expression that was alien to it both theologically and ethically. Indeed, at least some of the men responsible for this identification of the Mennonite cause with that of the Fundamentalists were conscious of the dangers inherent in it. George R. Brunk was extremely critical of the "laxitarian" Fundamentalists and constantly warned against the errors of Calvinism and Plymouth Brethrenism. Against the "so-called Fundamentalists" both he and Daniel Kauffman stressed the "all things" of Scripture—the ordinances not generally accepted by other Protestants, nonresistance and separation from the world. Nevertheless having entered this *caveat* they identified with their cause. "The Mennonite Church," wrote Daniel Kauffman, "is firmly committed to the Fundamentalist faith; including some unpopular tenets of faith which many so-called Fundamentalists reject."¹ They were frightened by the specter of Modernism and by "liberalism" in the Mennonite Church and they readily accepted the Fundamentalists' definition of the issues and adopted their line of defense.

As these men saw it, the issue was the authenticity and authority of the Bible understood "literally." By literal they meant that the accounts of supernatural activity such as creation were to be understood as "historic fact and literally true,"² and that the teachings of Christ and the apostles were to be literally and directly applied to the life of the church today. Thus, for example, the church is not to "spiritualize" such practices as the veiling of women for worship, or washing the saints' feet. Neither may it adapt scriptural commands such as those against the wearing of gold in order to permit gold watches or eyeglass frames.

In their uncritical acceptance of a fundamentalistic definition of biblical authority resting on a particular theory of inspiration these leaders saddled the Mennonite Church with concepts which were not endemic to it and which are even yet causing anxiety as we

¹ Daniel Kauffman, ed., *Mennonite Cyclopedic Dictionary* (Scottsdale, 1937) 116.

² "The Christian Fundamentals," Article 3. See J. C. Wenger, *Doctrines of the Mennonites* (Scottsdale, 1950) 86.

attempt in our seminaries to more carefully examine the nature of Scripture's authority and application to the present-day church.

This criticism, however, should be qualified at the outset with a word of deep appreciation for the dedication and spiritual foresight of the men who gave leadership to the Mennonite Church during the years 1900-45. We can thank God that they preserved for us a heritage that takes the Bible with utmost seriousness, and if through theological naivete they have left us with some inadequate hermeneutical precedents, we should not be overly critical. Rather, we should follow their high example in loyalty to the witness of the Holy Spirit in Scripture even though we beg leave to re-examine their theological definitions.

What I propose to do in this paper is to put the above criticism in historical and theological perspective so that we might understand the nature of the task that lies before us in the reappraisal of the issues. In my judgment it is extremely important that we should not a second time be forced to decide between inadequate options through faulty understanding of either our own history or the present theological situation.

POST-REFORMATION DEVELOPMENTS IN PROTESTANT ORTHODOXY

In order to understand the significance of the Mennonite-Fundamentalist alliance at the opening of the twentieth century we must first of all review briefly two areas of development within both Protestant Orthodoxy and Mennonitism following the Reformation era. The development of a doctrine of Scripture and a hermeneutic were closely related to other theological developments, and cannot be properly understood outside the larger context. Formally the developments within both these traditions are properly designated legalism but with a difference. Orthodoxy veered toward *theological* legalism while the Mennonites soon were mired in *moral* legalism. And this difference is significant for understanding their views of Scripture.

Lutheranism, following the lead of Melanchthon, soon lost Luther's emphasis upon the evangelical experience and the definition of faith as trusting acceptance of God's grace. Reverting to the scholastic position, the Lutheran theologians defined faith as rational assent to correct doctrine. Already in the Augsburg Confession of 1530 it is suggested that belief in the *doctrine* of justification by faith is necessary for salvation by faith. Such a definition of faith underscored the primary importance of the correct formulation of doctrine. In turn the consequent emphasis on correct theology led to dissension and dissimulation among the Lutherans themselves and between

the Lutherans and the Reformed. Indeed, the schisms that rent the Lutheran churches in Germany between 1545 and 1600 parallel in intensity and scope the schisms among the Dutch Mennonites during roughly the same period.

At the heart of both the Lutheran and Reformed debates was the question of monergism versus synergism, or, in Reformed terminology, God's sovereignty versus man's free will. What is the nature of God's action in man's behalf? How is man involved in his own salvation? What kind of a response is required of him? Indeed, what kind of response is possible for him? The advocates of strict predestination and sovereignty were able to dominate the theology of the period. Beginning with the Augustinian definition of man's total inability even to co-operate with God, the emphasis was placed upon God's sovereign initiative. With unrelieved logic the monergists spelled out a system that would safeguard God's sovereign and exclusive role in the salvation of man.

At the expense of gross oversimplification we note that this had far-reaching and serious consequences not only for theology but for the whole life of the church. Man's part in salvation was greatly minimized in favor of God's "supernatural" activity. Christ's humanity was likewise minimized, and the atonement became a legal transaction within the Godhead while justification was described as a "legal fiction." The supernatural was distinguished sharply from the natural and in every case given the priority of logical necessity.

It was in the context of this theological climate that the further definition of biblical inspiration and authority were developed in Protestant Orthodoxy. When faith was defined as assent to correct doctrine, the Bible came to be viewed as the source-book for correct doctrine. Scripture was no longer interpreted as the dynamic message of a "gospel" which aroused trust and repentance. It became a book of holy doctrine which must be subscribed to in order to be saved—hence the term theological legalism.

Following this logic it was imperative that the doctrines contained in Scripture be imbued with supreme validity and authority. If Scripture is to be an authoritative source and criterion of doctrine, it must have God's infallible imprimatur in every detail. Certainty of salvation could rest securely only on God who acts in a supernatural fashion apart from and in spite of man to produce a book of saving doctrine. Indeed, it must be in effect his words free from any errors that might detract from its character as a source of basic information upon which and from which a theological system might be logically derived. In the words of the Westminster Confession

(1647), authoritative doctrine must be "either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequences . . . be deduced from Scripture."

It is at once obvious that only God could be the author of such an inerrant book. And if he deigned to use human writers, it would be necessary for him to control the process sufficiently to overrule their errors. The monergistic bias of these orthodox theologians provided the theological setting for just such a theory. The Second Helvetic Consensus of 1675 takes the position that the language of Scripture itself is a special, supernaturally designed vehicle of God's revelation.

. . . The Hebrew Original of the Old Testament, which we have received and to this day do retain as handed down by the Jewish Church, unto whom formerly "were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. iii, 2), is, not only in its consonants, but in its vowels—either the vowel points themselves, or at least the power of the points—not only in its matter, but in its words, inspired of God, thus forming, together with the Original of the New Testament, the sole and complete rule of our faith and life; and to its standard, as to a Lydian stone, all extant versions, oriental and occidental, ought to be applied, and wherever they differ, be conformed.³

Quenstedt (1617-1688), a Lutheran theologian of the strictly orthodox party, provides us with a classical statement of the resulting inerrancy of a dictated text:

The original canonical s[acred] scripture is of infallible truthfulness and wholly free of error, or, what is the same thing, in the canonical s[acred] scripture there is no lie, no falsehood, not even the smallest error either in words or in matter, but everything, together and singly, that is handed on in them is most true, whether it be a matter of dogma or of morals or of history or of chronology or of topography or of nomenclature no want of knowledge, no thoughtfulness or forgetfulness, no lapse of memory can or ought to be attributed to the secretaries of the H[oly] Spirit in their setting down of the s[acred] writings.⁴

Not all of Protestantism followed this lead even in the seventeenth century, and certainly as we shall see in the pages that follow it was not a part of the Mennonite tradition prior to the early twentieth century. What is significant for our purposes, however, is that the Fundamentalists and the theologians of old Princeton did espouse these formulas, and these are the sources from which it was imported into the Mennonite Church.

³ Article 2. From Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*. The Consensus was written by John Henry Heidegger, a Reformed theologian from Zürich.

⁴ From Quenstedt's *Theologia didactico-polemica*, Part I, Ch. IV, Sect. ii, question 5. Quoted by Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?" *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 36, (Sept. 1965): 578.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ANABAPTIST-MENNONITE TRADITION

In contrast to the Protestants, who defined faith as assent to doctrine and worked from a monergistic premise, the Anabaptists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries defined it essentially as obedience to Scripture and were frankly synergistic. Where Orthodoxy said one must believe (give assent to) certain doctrines in order to be saved, the Anabaptists held that one must obey the law of Christ to be saved. Saving faith was obedient faith, or "obedience through grace," as Twisck put it in his confession of faith.

Faith in Scripture for the second generation Anabaptists, then, meant acceptance of it as the moral authority for life rather than subscription to its authoritative doctrine. They were not primarily concerned with correct theories of inspiration which would guarantee the Bible's rational authority. Neither were they under any logical compulsion to formulate a theory that would eliminate all the effects of human co-operation in its production and thus keep its authority purely objective. Scripture's authority rested on the fact that it was *God's covenant* with man, and it was an authority to be obeyed rather than defined. Thus in the "Confession of Faith According to the Holy Word of God" by Peter Jansz Twisck (1565-1636) the article on "The Written Word of God" deals with the relative authority of the old and new covenants for regulating the Christian life. The old covenant, he asserts, was "perfect" for the men who lived before Christ, but the New Testament is "the new law of Jesus Christ," and to this law

all decrees, councils and ordinances made contrary to it by men in the world, must give place; but all Christians must necessarily, as far as the faith is concerned, regulate and conduct themselves only in accordance with this blessed Gospel of Christ. And as the outward man lives outwardly by the nourishment of bread; so the inward man of the soul lives by every word proceeding from the mouth of the Lord. Therefore the Word of God must be purely and sincerely preached, heard, received and kept, by all believers.⁵

The point here is that this article on Scripture, quite in contrast to the creeds of Protestant Orthodoxy, does not make a correct doctrine of scriptural inspiration fundamental to the rest of doctrine. Neither does it make any attempt whatsoever to spell out the nature of inspiration or its theological implications. Scripture is simply accepted as the trustworthy instrument of God for the disclosure of his will in Christ. Thus all Christians are bound to submit their

⁵ Pieter Jansz Twisck (1565-1636) was an elder in the Old Frisian Mennonite congregation at Hoorn, Holland. He was a conservative who defended Menno's views against the more liberal Waterlander leaders. His confession received wide distribution in the United States because of its inclusion in the *Martyrs Mirror* (see p. 382 of 1950 edition). It was also published by itself in English at Winchester, Va., in 1837.

“whole heart mind and soul under the obedience of Christ and the mind of the Holy Spirit *as expressed in the holy Scriptures.*”⁶

There is no article on Scripture as such in the Dordrecht Confession (1632), but in Article V, “Of the Law of Christ, Which is the Holy Gospel, or the New Testament” we find the same emphasis on the authority of the new covenant as in Twisck’s confession. The article speaks not of a book but of a covenant, not of a canon but of a gospel proclaimed through His apostles. This proclamation is obviously identified with the canonical New Testament which contains “the whole counsel and will of his heavenly Father, as far as these are necessary to the salvation of man,” but the clear implication is that the authority of the New Testament rests upon the fact that it is the authentic proclamation of the “Holy Gospel” of salvation. The authority of the New Testament scriptures—it does not explicitly speak of the Old—is Jesus Christ. The New Testament is *his* covenant proclaimed by men of his choice and calling, hence its authority.

Of the other confessions known to and widely used by Mennonites in America only that of Cornelis Ris contains an article on Holy Scripture. Ris took great care over a number of years (1747-66) to formulate a balanced and comprehensive statement. His confession shows definite influence of the Reformed and Arminian theology, and agrees generally with the latter. As one might expect under these circumstances, Article II, “Of the Holy Scripture,” follows a form more like the Protestant Confessions. However, it is quite biblical and non-scholastic both in content and mood.

Ris speaks of Scripture as an “incalculable boon” because without it we would be “much in the dark, as has been generally true of all the heathen.” The Bible records as much of God’s revelation in the past “as is necessary for us as a rule of faith and conduct.”

These Scriptures we call holy because they are inspired (*eingeben*) by God and written by holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. II Peter 1:21. We accept them, therefore, not as man’s word but God’s Word; as the only infallible and sufficient rule of faith and conduct (*Leben*) to which we owe supreme reverence and obedience.^{6a}

What is most intriguing, however, in the Ris Confession is his list of “weighty arguments” upon which faith in Scripture rests.

6 *Ibid.* Italics mine.

6a The Ris Confession originally in Dutch was translated into German in 1776 and 1849, and was known to American Mennonites only in translation. An English translation was made from the German in 1904. This version was reprinted as late as 1961 and published at Newton, Kansas. The German word *eingeben* was the usual term for “inspiration” and translates the Dutch *ingegeven*.

There is not even a hint of the scholastic definition of inerrancy among them. Rather it is Scripture's clarity of disclosure, worthiness of content, and the holy ends which they serve that commend them. Added to these are the miracles, fulfillment of prophecy "and many other things" which God has done to convince us of their divine mission. And he concludes, "Everyone who yields himself in honest obedience and submission to the Word of God, finds peace of heart and obtains for himself the assurance of the truth."

Here is no talk of verbal inspiration and inerrancy even to the minutest details of Scripture such as we find in the Lutheran and Swiss Reformed theologians of the same period. The Mennonite writers do, of course, speak of inspiration, and they often quote II Timothy 3:16, and II Peter 1:21, but taken in context these statements do not mean or imply the fundamentalist doctrine of "verbal and plenary inspiration." The authority of Scripture is grounded on the authority of Christ, and it is validated in faithful obedience to its precepts.

Two features that are characteristic of Mennonite discussions of Scripture need to be carefully observed at this point. In the first place, the concept of inspiration is spoken of in connection with the high value of Scripture as a guide to the knowledge of God. It does not convey to Scripture some supernatural quality of perfection, but rather makes it profitable for us. Thus, e.g., in Gerrit Roosen's *Conversation on Saving Faith*,⁷ another doctrinal symbol which had widespread use in America, the assertion of inspiration of Scripture is in answer to the question (8) "In what respect then are the Holy Scriptures preferable to other writings [of the wise heathen which are not sufficient to bring us to a saving knowledge of God]?" And the answer is that Holy Scripture is the Scripture inspired by God for man's instruction, punishment, correction and understanding in righteousness (II Tim. 3:16), and that it was given through highly enlightened holy men who were especially gifted by God's Spirit above others and who wrote by God's inspiration. The emphasis is clearly that *men* are inspired to write things profitable and in that sense also their writings may be referred to as inspired.

In the second place, in keeping with their strong emphasis on the centrality of faithful obedience they made "supreme reverence and obedience" the touchstone for a valid confession of Scripture rather than a technically correct statement of its inspiration. They deemed the correct use of Scripture as the Spirit's regulation for life

⁷ This may be found in Wenger, *Doctrine of the Mennonites*, 111 ff. Roosen (1612-1711) was a prominent minister in the Hamburg-Altona congregation for many years. His catechism, "On Saving Faith," was first published in German in 1702. It went through many editions and translations and was widely used in the Mennonite Church.

to be more important than a correct formulation of the Spirit's activity in the process of transcribing Scripture.

In a similar manner the concept of Scripture's infallibility, which is quite common in older Mennonite literature, is in every significant reference conceived as the infallibility of its witness to Christ and his will for us. The emphasis is upon its absolute trustworthiness *as a guide to salvation and the true knowledge of God*. The Ris Confession says that Scripture is the "only infallible and sufficient" source of our knowledge. And according to the "Waldeck Catechism" (first published in 1778)⁸ the evidence of infallibility is that "all things written therein, foretold of Christ, have been literally fulfilled."

The reference in the Roosen Catechism to the "infallible Word of God" as that upon which saving faith must be grounded requires this same interpretation. In addition it raises two other interesting points. First, it is clear that the "Word of God" in this context does not mean simply Scripture, but rather God's message of salvation in contrast to man's wisdom. Thus infallibility is not being ascribed to the Scriptures as documents but to the message which they bring. Second, the Old and New Testaments are spoken of as *servants* of the Word. There is no simple equation of words written in the Scripture and the Word of God. There are statements, as for example in the Waldeck Catechism, that follow the common pattern of identifying the two without any technical equation. This is quite common in Protestant parlance and should not be cited as evidence of verbal dictation.

In summary, then, it may be stated that in none of these confessions and catechisms which were in general use in the American Mennonite churches from 1750 to 1900 is there any attempt to spell out a theory of inspiration for the documents. Indeed, in the most widely used symbols, Dordrecht and Roosen's Catechism, there were no articles as such on Scripture. The Bible is accepted as completely trustworthy and inspired by God for man's guidance, but emphasis falls upon the content and unique value of its message, not upon verbal inerrancy.

Precisely these same emphases characterize the articles, tracts, and books by American Mennonite authors published in the period 1750-1900. They assumed the Scripture's authority and concentrated on its contents seeking to understand and apply it. They conceived of the Bible as a disclosure of God's will and approached it as a

⁸ This catechism, which is also known as *Kurze und einfältige Unterweisung aus der Heiligen Schrift*, was published in many editions in French and English. It first appeared in English in 1849, and Funk issued a revised English edition in 1874.

book of instructions and moral precepts with the confidence that in its pages they would find "the mind of the Holy Spirit." Even Christ was for them the giver of a new law, and their discussions have mainly to do with the Christian life and conduct.

This conception of the Bible became for them a hermeneutic principle. In their preaching and writing they went to great length to recount the story of man's creation, fall, and redemption era by era,⁹ and their purpose was to make clear the relation of law and grace—the old and new covenants. Thus their expositions of the history of salvation are not so much focused upon the great acts of God as upon man's response to God's disclosures and the developments which lead to the new covenant law. They argued that the new law requires a higher, spiritual obedience of love, and it is the purpose of the New Testament to lead to such obedience.

This preoccupation with rules of conduct produced many examples of quaint proof-texting and the finding of direct guidance from the pages of the Bible. Either example or precept sufficed to document a decision of the church. In his *Useful and Edifying Addresses to the Young* (1792), Christian Burkholder, a prominent bishop in Pennsylvania, argued that interdenominational marriages are forbidden in the Bible on the basis of Numbers 36:6-8 which restricted marriage among the Israelites "only to the family and tribe of their fathers."¹⁰ Heinrich Funk thought that he could demonstrate that the wicked will be "transformed into the appearance of a sackcloth of hair, as the scripture says. . . ."¹¹ And J. M. Brenneman of a later generation could find many texts to prove that "Christians ought not to laugh aloud."¹²

I think that we might call this approach to Scripture a pre-theological biblicism. There is a kind of artless freedom under the guidance of the Spirit to use the Scriptures for admonishing the brotherhood. They were not challenged to defend the Bible against attacks upon its authority. When they wrote about it, they magnified and praised it, pointing out the superiority of its contents, but they simply assumed its divine origin and validity. Therefore, to read a theory of verbal inerrancy into their writings is anachronistic. They had no defined doctrine of inspiration either as to its scope or exact meaning.

⁹ Heinrich Funk said that the three stories of Noah's ark typified the three eras of revelation: (1) Adam to the flood, (2) flood to Christ, and (3) Christ's incarnation to the end of the world. He believed that only in the second coming would the full glory of God be revealed. See *Eine Restitution oder Erklärung einiger Hauptpunkte des Gesetzes* (1763), translated into English by A. B. Kolb and published by Mennonite Publishing House, 1915.

¹⁰ Part IV of *Conversation on Saving Faith* (Lancaster, Pa., 1870) 245.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, 437.

¹² *Plain Teachings or Simple Illustrations and Exhortations from the Word of God* (Elkhart, 1876) 242-44.

It is clear then that when we arrive at the opening of the twentieth century, the development of an articulate theology of Scripture still lies ahead. Even the writing of men like D. H. Bender, M. S. Steiner, and Daniel Kauffman, who later espouse "verbal and plenary inspiration," do not reveal any new emphases on the doctrine of Scripture prior to 1908.

TWENTIETH CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS IN MENNONITE THEOLOGY

In order to see the significant change of mood and emphasis that took place in Mennonite doctrine during the first quarter of the twentieth century one has only to compare the statement on *Christian Fundamentals* which was adopted by General Conference in 1921 with the earlier confessional symbols. This statement was first drawn up by a "Committee on the Investigation of Liberalism in the Church" appointed in the Virginia Conference in 1918. Members of the committee were George R. Brunk, Sr., A. D. Wenger, and J. B. Smith, the last of whom apparently wrote the eighteen articles. The "Eighteen Fundamentals" were presented by the committee to the 1919 session of Virginia Conference and adopted as the conference statement of faith. With few minor editorial changes and additions of Scripture texts, these articles were accepted by General Conference meeting at Garden City, Missouri, in 1921.

The "Preamble" of this Garden City statement sets the mood for the rest. It reads:

In order to safeguard our people from the inroads of false doctrines which assail the Word of God and threaten the foundations of our faith, we, the Mennonite General Conference . . . herewith make the following declaration regarding the fundamental doctrines of our faith.^{12a}

The first article of the statement is on the Bible. In it the Bible is simply equated with the Word of God. Indeed, the article is entitled "The Word of God" rather than Holy Scripture even though the Bible is the subject. The purpose of the article is to defend the authority of Scripture by explicitly equating it with Word of God. Further, it is declared to be the Word of God on the grounds of its "verbal and plenary inspiration," not on the grounds of its divine content as in earlier statements. And in addition to using the more traditional language concerning its infallibility as a rule of faith and practice, the article explicitly says that the original writings were inerrant.

If we look further in the statement for some hint concerning the implications of this verbal inerrancy theory, we are only confirmed in this evaluation. Article III reads, for example, "We believe that

^{12a} "Report of Committee on Fundamentals," *Gospel Herald* (Nov. 10, 1921) 627.

the Genesis account of the Creation is an historic fact and literally true." Here then is a definition of the process and extent of inspiration, and it is simply the definition of Reformed and Lutheran Orthodoxy which was again being pressed into service by the Fundamentalists.

The beginning of this shift in mood and emphasis may be dated at about 1908 and can be traced both in conference minutes and articles published in Mennonite periodicals. Prior to that time neither the *Herald of Truth* (Elkhart) nor the *Gospel Witness* (Scottdale), nor the first volume of the new *Gospel Herald* for that matter, show any serious involvement in the theological storm that was brewing in America.

In 1907 an article entitled "The Bible Inspired," which presages the coming storm, was published in Daniel Kauffman's (editor) *Gospel Witness*. In the first volume (1908) of the *Gospel Herald* Kauffman published an editorial on "Inspiration" in which he makes the point that the Bible is inspired by God in a unique way, and that we must "accept Jesus Christ as our Savior *and the Bible as the life-giving word and only inspired message from heaven.*"¹³ These are quite mild and might be overlooked except for what was to follow.

In 1909 at least three articles from non-Mennonite sources on "Protestant Apostasy" and liberalism were printed. The following year John Horsch had a series of excerpts from Menno Simons printed under the title "Menno Simons on the Authority of the Holy Scriptures." And that same year Kauffman authored and published a series of articles under the title "Upon What Fundamentals Should All Christian People Agree?" The fifth "fundamental" was on the Bible as the inspired Word of God, and he says that denying inspiration is tantamount to denying the Bible. After 1910 articles of this type become increasingly numerous.

Not only are the articles more numerous, but they show clear signs of their extra-Mennonite source. In an article on "Inspiration and Authority of the Epistolary Writings" in the January 1913 *Gospel Herald*, Abram Metzler speaks of "the great tidal wave of the latter day apostasy," and of "dispensational grace." He also used a phrase that was the slogan of the Niagara Bible Conference movement, "to the law and the testimonies." Leaders of the Fundamentalist movement such as W. B. Riley, W. J. Bryan, R. A. Torrey, and Philip Mauro are referred to, quoted in articles and reprinted in toto. In 1918 George Brunk entered a charge against evolution, scientism, and higher criticism—the latter had come in for ridicule in

earlier issues—worthy of the best fundamentalist preachers.¹⁴ He noted with satisfaction that the scientists' presumptuous efforts to create life have come to an inglorious end. These are only a few examples that could be multiplied many times.

A review of conference minutes, both district and General Conference, reveals the same kind of progression of involvement in the Fundamentalist debate. We find the first explicit evidence that the church leaders in general were concerned about the new theological currents in the 1909 minutes of General Conference.¹⁵ One of the major questions for discussion that year was the Conference's attitude toward "the modern trend of religious thought." The question was discussed by P. E. Whitmer, a Bible teacher at Goshen College who was later under the suspicion of "liberalism" himself, and others. A resolution was passed in answer to this question as follows:

Resolved, That we stand for a whole-Gospel religion which recognizes Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and the Bible as the inspired Word of God (II Tim. 3:16); which teaches true conversion and an experimental religion (Jno. 17:3; Eph. 4:13); an acceptance of Christ as our Savior (Acts 4:12); His Gospel our rule of life (Ga. 1:8, 9); and His Spirit as our teacher and guide (Jno. 14:26; 16:13).¹⁶

In 1911 the question "What is meant by the so-called essentials and non-essentials, and how do they effect our church?" was raised in the Indiana-Michigan Conference. J. E. Hartzler, the pastor of Prairie Street Church, who had just returned from Union Theological Seminary in New York and had only recently received an appointment to the Bible faculty of Goshen College, opened the discussion on the question. Conference passed a resolution in answer to the question stating that they "discourage such classification [essential and non-essential] and encourage the acceptance of the whole Bible as sacred and important."

I point to this action because it provides significant evidence concerning the stage of developments in one of the first conferences to raise the biblical issue in its formal meetings. In the first place, its having been raised in Indiana and J. E. Hartzler's prominence in

14 "The Present Apostasy" (March 21, 1918) 931-32.

15 Perhaps this is the place to point out that the years 1908-10 were crucial years for the growing Fundamentalist movement in general. In 1907 the International Sunday School lessons began with the Old Testament and higher critical findings were introduced into the materials of several denominations. Some denominational publications likewise printed articles that seemed favorable to the "New Theology." The New York Presbytery accepted three Union Theological Seminary candidates for the ministry in spite of their avowed liberal convictions. These and other incidents of the same kind convinced the conservatives that the major denominations were in peril of defection to the liberals. There was a rather sudden wave of increased alarm throughout the Fundamentalist camp, and they launched a full-scale attack which culminated in the formulation of the World Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919. It is interesting to note how closely the awareness and growing concern among the Mennonites paralleled this more general escalation of the battle.

16 *Proceedings of the Mennonite General Conference* (n.p., 1921), 133.

the discussion indicate one source of the new and unsettling ideas which were beginning to trouble some church leaders and called forth this reaffirmation of orthodoxy. Secondly, the way in which the question is stated indicates that the major problem was not a doctrine of Scripture, but the application of biblical teaching in a changing cultural situation. Some of the older applications were being dropped, and the justification for dropping them was that they were among the "non-essentials" of the Bible. And lastly, the language of the resolution indicates that fundamentalist terminology had not yet penetrated here. The resolution is in the best Mennonite tradition—"the whole Bible as sacred and important." Incidentally, the men on the resolutions committee that year were J. K. Bixler, D. A. Yoder, and S. L. Weldy.

That same fall (1911) the Kansas-Nebraska conference raised the question whether versions other than the King James Version should be used in public worship. They resolved that they should not, and proceeded to declare their belief "in the verbal inspiration of the Bible in the original." They also passed another resolution petitioning the General Mission Board to use utmost caution in selecting candidates for missionary work and requested "that only such workers be sent forth that believe in the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Bible and take a stand against the modern trend of religious thought."¹⁷ So far as I know this is the first time a conference statement used the phrase "verbal inspiration . . . in the original," and I strongly suspect that it was no coincidence that J. B. Smith of the Hesston Bible faculty was on the resolutions committee. Smith was the man who perhaps more than any other introduced this kind of theological terminology into our brotherhood.

Again in 1913, meeting only a matter of days before the General Conference, the question of biblical inspiration was raised in the Indiana-Michigan conference. Again J. E. Hartzler officially opened the discussion, and in addition he served on the resolutions committee. At this time Hartzler was the newly elected president of Goshen College. Suspicion about the theological orthodoxy of the College Bible faculty and of President Byers made it necessary for Hartzler to declare himself clearly and openly.

The resolution summarizing the conference position on this question is longer than usual and is divided into four parts. It begins by distinguishing between "inspiration, revelation and dictation." Inspiration, they wrote, has to do with "the recording, the making truth known," but they added that it "*does not create truth but . . .*

¹⁷ *Conference Record of the Kansas-Nebraska Mennonite Conference 1876-1914* (n.p., n.d.) 166, 168.

is found in the use made of truth." Then the resolution goes on to affirm the "full and complete inspiration of the whole Bible as the message of God to man," and that "as an inspired record of revelation it is the perfect and heavenly message."¹⁸

Here is obviously a studied attempt, most likely on the part of Hartzler himself, to affirm a high view of biblical inspiration without using fundamentalist terminology. It is the "message" of the "Bible as a whole" that is "inspired," "perfect," and "heavenly," and its inspiration is found in the use made of truth. As we have seen this is fully in harmony with earlier confessions and catechisms.

Again the fact that B. B. King, who served on the resolutions committee with him, as well as other conservative men like J. S. Hartzler, J. K. Bixler, and D. D. Miller were satisfied with this resolution is good evidence that the finer points of Fundamentalism had still not become part of these men's thinking. But there are other signs that fundamentalist theology was beginning to make its impact.

At the meeting of General Conference at Kalona, Iowa, that fall (1913) the Conference was asked to define its position on the inspiration of the Bible. In answer the following was adopted:

Ans. We accept the Bible as the one inspired, infallible, inerrant message of God, revealing Himself, His workmanship and His will to man.

We believe the inspiration of the Bible to be different in kind and degree from any other literature in this: The men who wrote the Bible were in the hands of God to such an extent that their message, inbreathed of God, is free from all human imperfections, and is therefore absolutely inerrant and reliable, while in all other literature the imperfections and shortcomings of the writers find their way into their productions. Notwithstanding errors in language which appear in translations and revisions, the message of God as originally given to man is perfect and furthermore He preserves this message absolutely inerrant making the Bible God's eternal message to man, complete and sufficient for all ages.¹⁹

At the first reading this resolution sounds very fundamentalistic in tone and language. Scripture is "the one inspired, infallible, inerrant *message* of God." Further, "the men who wrote the Bible were in the hands of God to such an extent that their *message* . . . is free from all human imperfections and is therefore absolutely inerrant and reliable" in contrast to all other literature. But then they add somewhat ambiguously that "notwithstanding errors in language which appear in translations and revisions, the *message* of God," not only as originally given but even in its present form, is

¹⁸ *Minutes of the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference 1864-1929* (Scottsdale, n.d.) 119-20. Italics mine.

¹⁹ J. E. Hartzler was on the resolutions committee that drafted this answer, and along with him were George R. Brunk, Daniel Kauffman, C. Z. Yoder, and Norman Stauffer. See printed minutes of the conference.

preserved “absolutely inerrant making the Bible God’s eternal *message* to man.” I have italicized the word “message” because apparently it is purposely used instead of “words” of God. Thus, the message of the present translations is inerrant in spite of “errors in language which appear” in them.²⁰

In reporting the action of the conference in the *Gospel Herald*²¹ Daniel Kauffman said that the statement spoke to two vital issues: “(1) The Bible is God’s Word. (2) It is inerrant.” And a little later he says, “Really, this is not a debatable question—unless you consider the whole doctrine of Christianity debatable.” It is clear from Kauffman’s discussion that he considers inspiration the guarantor of revelation, i.e., the Bible is God’s Word by virtue of its inspiration, but he rejects the theory of inspiration “which represents God as speaking to the world through a set of dummies,” and affirms that “the Bible is at once the message from God and the message from the men whom He inspired for that special work.” Kauffman does not attempt to spell out a theory of inspiration beyond the Conference statement itself. He seems entirely satisfied with it, and he reports that the only dissatisfaction expressed to it on the conference floor was that no evidences for the Bible’s inspiration were included in the statement.

One should probably not press the significance of the ambiguity and imprecision of the statement too far because it is obvious that the intention of the Conference was to declare for the orthodox position. But this statement does represent another stage in the evolution of Articles I and III of the *Christian Fundamentals* of 1921.

In the meanwhile a General Conference committee which had been appointed in 1911 was at work compiling a book of *Bible Doctrine* under the general editorship of Daniel Kauffman. The finished symposium which was the work of eighteen different ministers and teachers was published in 1914, and J. B. Smith had the chapter on “The Bible.” It is significant that there is no chapter on revelation in this volume. A section of three and one half pages in the chapter on God is devoted to “Theories as to how He is Revealed.” In comparison forty pages are devoted to the Bible. This indicates how completely those who were responsible for this book identified Bible and supernatural revelation.

In his opening Smith equates Bible and Word of God and turns immediately to a doctrine of Scripture—its nature, unity, inspiration,

²⁰ Hartzler’s presence on both this committee and the Indiana-Michigan committee probably accounts for the similarity of language on this point. Be that as it may, it is significant that both G. R. Brunk and Daniel Kauffman subscribed to this language inasmuch as they moved far beyond this in the next few years.

²¹ Volume 6 (December 11, 1913): 577-79. The wording of the conference definition is capable of being interpreted in more than one way, and one cannot escape the impression that Kauffman has given it a fundamentalist interpretation.

canon, and transmission of texts. This is the most thorough and scholarly article to have appeared on this subject in the Mennonite Church, and it remained a basic reference for many years. We cannot examine it in detail, nor do we need to. Suffice it to say that it follows assiduously the best in the Bible Conference tradition which represented a coalescence of the older Orthodoxy and the emerging Fundamentalism. Smith is thoroughly acquainted with the terminology, and he fully understands and agrees with its implications. For example, Smith quotes with approval the English scholar, Dean Burgon, who wrote, "The Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth on the throne—every book of it, every chapter of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, and every letter of it is the direct utterance of the Most High."²²

When Kauffman revised the volume under the title *Doctrines of the Bible* (1928), he rewrote most of the chapter, but he did not change the basic point of view. He gave more attention to the doctrine of revelation, which he describes as a transfer of information about topics that otherwise would be a complete mystery to us. But his major concern is with inspiration and he does not hesitate to extend inspiration to "the very letter."²³

WHY MENNONITE LEADERS IDENTIFIED WITH FUNDAMENTALISM

What I have attempted to demonstrate with this survey of materials is that prior to 1910 the Mennonite Church's doctrine of Scripture was inchoate, and that the rationale which she accepted under the leadership of men like J. B. Smith, Daniel Kauffman, George R. Brunk, Abram Metzler, A. D. Wenger, S. G. Shetler and other prominent Bible teachers and evangelists of that generation was one simply borrowed from Protestant Orthodoxy in its new guise of Fundamentalism. As they began to be aware of the issues in modern theology, they knew that they were not liberals or Modernists, and in the heat of the moment they simply assumed that they were Fundamentalists. The major difference that they could see between themselves and Protestant Fundamentalists was their own willingness to be more consistent in the literal interpretation and obedience to Scripture—the "all things."

If we ask why they so uncritically accepted the ready-made answers of Protestant Orthodoxy rather than constructing a theology of Scripture more in keeping with their own tradition of simple biblicism, the answer is not far to find.

In the first place, these men were not trained in theology, nor did they have a theological tradition of their own to fall back upon.

²² *Bible Doctrine* (Scottsdale, 1914) 111.

²³ *Doctrines of the Bible* (Scottsdale, 1928) 144.

The renaissance in Anabaptists studies still lay ahead. John Horsch was beginning to uncover the earlier history, but he was highly excited over the Modernist-Fundamentalist debate and tended to read Fundamentalism back into the sixteenth-century fathers. Men like Hartzler,²⁴ Whitmer, and Byers had been theologically trained and recognized some similarities between traditional Mennonitism and the moral and practical emphasis of the Ritschlian theology they had contacted at Chicago and Union, and they attempted to maintain a position of neutrality with reference to the debate while remaining loyal to the church and the Bible. But their neutrality and their refusal to use the fundamentalist catch phrases and passwords only raised the suspicions of their more fundamentalistically inclined brethren who carried the day.

In the second place, the fact that the reawakening of the Mennonite Church which began about 1875 had been born in the matrix of revivalism and the American Bible and Prophetic Conference movements naturally created a bias favorable to the theology of that movement. A. D. Wenger, for example, spent a summer at Moody Bible Institute in 1894 and S. F. Coffman took courses there. J. B. Smith shows a thorough acquaintance with the literature of the Prophetic Conference movement as well as with the teachers of old Princeton. All too obvious words or phrases betray the origins of ideas which many of our evangelists were preaching and writing. Already by the 1880's the literature of the revivalist movement had become highly polemical, and many of our theologically self-educated leaders saw the issues only from this restricted point of view.

It is interesting to note that where a man had attended school often put him under suspicion fully as much or more than what he was actually teaching. I would attribute this awareness of the theological position of various graduate schools to the fact that schools like Union in New York and particularly Chicago Divinity School were under bitter attack in the fundamentalist periodicals and books of the time, and Mennonite leaders simply accepted their evaluations at face value.

In the third place, while the reawakening had produced new spiritual life, it had also set in motion a process of change and accommodation to cultural ("worldly") patterns that absorbed the energies of church leaders and deeply concerned even the more progressive ministers in the denomination. The mood of exhilaration and confidence which one might expect to accompany a period of awakening and renewal was muted by the tension and anxiety produced by rapid

²⁴ In later years (1920's and 30's) Hartzler moved further to the theological left, but at least as late as 1914 Dan Kauffman was satisfied with his orthodoxy.

social change. Concern became the dominant mood of the era. Men were not sure that the new spiritual forces which had been let loose were adequate to contain the "drift." Questions like "How can we get our people to be more mission-minded and more interested in the Bible?" "How can we get our sisters to wear bonnets?", and "How can we keep our schools from drifting into worldliness?", lie side by side on the conference records, bearing mute testimony to the anxiety and problem-centered approach to even the joyous privilege of evangelism. This anxiety was augmented by a newly imported emphasis in eschatology which stressed "the apostasy" of the church and warned against the dangers of living in the "end times."

In this situation the problem of control, both in the sense of a recognized standard and the power to compel conformity, was uppermost. The leaders needed the sure support of an absolute authority, and the Bible alone could provide such a control. Any lessening of the Bible's authority represented a major threat to the leadership, for without a clear and certain conviction of its infallible rightness they would have been hopelessly unable to regulate the life of the church. Thus, they were in no mood to debate or take time to formulate the finer theological points of a doctrine of Scripture. The Scriptures had been established as God's infallible Word and not man's. They had been imbued with a supernatural authority which could not be questioned, and a theological definition designed precisely to establish that point lay ready at hand. Little wonder then that they grasped and held it tenaciously.

It is not surprising to notice that this was also the period in which conference authority was strengthened to buttress and fortify the ministry. Although there were small pockets of incipient theological liberalism in the Mennonite Church during the period of 1910-24, they were by no means significant or threatening enough to account for the violent and widespread fundamentalistic reaction which dominated the mood of the denomination during those years. It may, no doubt, be partially accounted for by the new awareness of and interest in the events of the larger Christian community, and by a frank recognition that Mennonites could no longer escape the influence of other Christian denominations. But this is not adequate to account for its intensity.

One can only conclude that the threat inherent in the growing social change produced a mood among the Mennonite leaders which made them highly susceptible to the fundamentalist anxiety that swept the country from about 1908-25. That the two areas of

concern, theological liberalism and cultural adaptation, were inextricably intertwined in their minds is seen in the double meaning of the word liberalism in the Mennonite denomination. One cannot escape the impression that a good deal of the excitement over liberalism was simply imported from the outside and superimposed upon the very real problem of cultural adaptation and reapplication of Scripture which faced the Mennonite Church. At any rate, it was in this climate that the first steps were taken toward a theology of Scripture, and quite naturally it took on a fundamentalist cast.

THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS—1940-1965

The flood of fundamentalist influence in the Mennonite Church crested sometime in the early 1940's although the waters continued to swirl for some years to come. By that time a new group of leaders was beginning to come to the fore. These men were the products of conservative theological schools such as Princeton Theological Seminary and some of the Baptist seminaries, and while there was no question about their conservatism yet they clearly avoided some of the more literalistic hermeneutics of the Fundamentalists and began to move the church toward a more moderate position. Harry Rimmer was still good for an occasional lecture at Goshen College, and J. Gresham Machen's interpretation of liberalism was still standard. Nevertheless there was perceptible progress toward a more substantial theologically oriented biblicism.

At the same time under the leadership of the late dean Harold Bender great strides ahead were made in the rediscovery of our own Anabaptist heritage. And with a clearer knowledge of our own tradition came the increasing awareness of the distance between Anabaptism and modern Fundamentalism.

So far as our theology of Scripture was concerned, however, we continued to take our cues from B. B. Warfield, Professor of Biblical and Polemical Theology at Princeton Seminary 1880-1921. In effect, we were abandoning the more superficial literalism of the Fundamentalists as a hermeneutical model, but we remained within the pale of Protestant Orthodoxy. This meant that we viewed revelation essentially as the transmission of information about subjects otherwise inaccessible to us, and we continued to define the Bible's inspiration as the inerrancy of its original autographs. We continued to take the position, further, that its value as revelation is based upon its inspiration thus conceived.²⁵

By the early 1950's there was a growing conviction among some

²⁵ See for example J. C. Wenger's address to General Conference in 1943 entitled "The Inspiration and Authority of the Scriptures," *Gospel Herald* (July 7, 1944): 266-67.

that the time had come to take a new look at the question of a theology of Scripture, and by the mid-50's the question had broken into the open among the seminary faculty at Goshen College. By 1960 we had shot the most dangerous part of the rapids, and it seemed that the seminary was committed to what I would call a conservative but nonfundamentalist position.

I think that it is clear that the so-called inductive method of Bible study furnished the bridge between the old point of view and the new. In the inductive method, we found a way to turn our attention again to the content and structure of Scripture without first settling the theological question of the nature of biblical inspiration and authority. And as we scrutinized the Scripture carefully and inductively it became increasingly clear that the old theological formulas were inadequate to describe what we actually found.

In effect, it could be said that we moved from the theological premise of B. B. Warfield of the old Princeton school to the theological position of a great conservative like James Orr. Orr had held that a theory of inspiration must follow an inductive examination of the Scripture and must be adequate to describe what one has actually found in the pages of Scripture. Warfield, on the other hand, in the tradition of Protestant Orthodoxy, held that a theological theory of inspiration must precede biblical interpretation and, in fact, be the ground for it.

I am of the opinion that the little pamphlet on "Biblical Inspiration and Revelation" by Harold Bender (1959) marks the transition from the one period to the other as clearly as any other document that we have.

This seems to me to be the point which we have reached in our seminary. As I view the situation, I see us using the tools and methods of a reverent biblical criticism to explore even more carefully the nature of the biblical documents and their message to us. But we are doing this not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end. The crucial question that faces us is the question of the Bible's authority for us today, and this is not a theoretical question but a very practical one. We who are completely convinced on the theoretical level of the Bible's authority for the church today, are called upon to find a dynamic and practical way in which to apply that authority so that it becomes conviction, moral and religious conviction, in the church, and can be used as a practical guide for the life of the church.

Many of the questions that were raised in conference in 1900-50 were prefaced with the words, "Is it in harmony with Scripture that . . .," and it is our deepest desire to continue this posture towards Scripture. But some of us are convinced that unless we can find more adequate methods of interpretation and more viable applications to the great issues of our present day, this authority of Scripture as a living reality in our church will be lost by default.

Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics

Millard C. Lind

Guy F. Hershberger demonstrated his interest in hermeneutics as he sought to establish biblical bases for guiding the life and work of the church in the world. He gave careful attention to matters of biblical interpretation, particularly the question of the relation of the Old and New Testaments, in his two major books on Anabaptist-Mennonite ethics.¹ Through his use of sociology, ethics, and history to elaborate the theological message of the Bible, he has contributed significantly to the development of my own thought.

My intention in this essay is to set forth a few reflections on a valid biblical hermeneutic, from a perspective informed by the Anabaptist tradition. These are the reflections of one who seeks to stand within that tradition, and who is in conversation with modern biblical studies within the ecumenical church and synagogue.²

By "hermeneutics" I mean the twofold effort to understanding the original language of the Bible within its ancient settings, and then to translate those understandings into modern language in its social context. This view of hermeneutics thus includes both biblical exegesis and biblical homiletics, which have often been considered as separate aspects. Such an approach demands a knowledge of the ancient languages and worlds, a knowledge of contemporary languages and worlds, and a method for moving from one to the other.

By "Anabaptist" I mean that movement which began in Europe in the sixteenth century as the result of the rise of humanistic biblical studies within a certain social-economic-political milieu. These studies led to the formation of a body of believers who saw themselves set apart from the world in which they lived, by virtue of their faith. They dared to act in freedom from that world, in response to the sovereignty of the resurrected Christ whose living presence they confessed.

A revolution has occurred in biblical studies since the sixteenth

century. Textual criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, archaeology, the recovery of whole libraries of ancient literatures—these have all contributed to a knowledge of the Bible which is greater now than at any time since the first century. Followers of the Anabaptist tradition, with its genuine interest in biblical authority, should welcome these advances. Within the context of ecumenical debate (a characteristic of sixteenth-century Anabaptism), we need to approach the Bible anew in every generation. Our new knowledge confirms some of the central insights of the sixteenth century, though it may set those insights within new perspectives, and may serve to correct others.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the hermeneutical revolution of the past century, there are some Anabaptist understandings that I find helpful in the interpretation of the Bible.³ They are:

1. The congregation as a hermeneutical community.
2. An understanding of the authority of both Old and New Testaments in a relationship that is not “flat” but historical, that is, a pattern of promise and fulfillment. (I am not sure that the early Anabaptists were as negative to the Old Testament as have been some Mennonites of the past generation.)
3. The emphasis on discipleship, with the consequent demand for discerning between true and false hermeneutics.
4. The challenge to prevailing concepts of political power, grounded in an analogy to the experience of the biblical people of God in their Near Eastern and Mediterranean context.⁴

For me, these points have an abiding relevance for the hermeneutical task of the faithful church.

Hermeneutics as Exegesis and Homiletics

Hermeneutics as we have defined it is divided into two parts, exegesis and homiletics. Exegesis is the attempt to discover what the original language meant. This original meaning is not easy to fix; it may refer to the oral tradition behind the text, or to the meaning of the text as a unit of written tradition, or to the meaning of the unit within a larger edited whole. In any case, we must realize that when we read the Bible we are crossing cultural barriers of both time and space. Bible translations which obliterate these barriers in order to make the Bible read like a modern book may have their uses, but they also have their debit side. They may remove the reader even further from the culture and milieu of which the Bible was a part. The very nature of the biblical faith, centered about certain prophetic-historical events, excludes

methods such as allegorizing that deny the Bible's historical character. All readers of the text should make their journey back into the strange world of the Bible, to the extent that their ability and calling permit them.

Biblical hermeneutics also demands a knowledge of today's languages. Along with moving back into history, the reader must move forward into the modern age. One must be able to say, in terms that modern man can begin to understand, what the mystery of the gospel means today. This problem is compounded when we remember that ours is a missionary task, and that we must communicate the gospel not only to ourselves, but to those who have no commitment to it, those to whom the Bible is utterly foreign. Here we can learn much from a prophet like Hosea, who seized the central myth of Baalism, broke it off from its mythological moorings, and used that language to proclaim the Yahwistic faith, or from Paul, who translated the Hebraically oriented gospel of Jesus into the milieu of the Greek world.

The Home of Biblical Hermeneutics

Viewing the congregation as a hermeneutical community is an important contribution of Anabaptism to biblical hermeneutics. This perspective enables the specialist to see himself as part of a team concerned with the larger hermeneutical question. It may deliver him from trivial and unprofitable questions in research, although there may be a difference of opinion as to what the important questions are. It should also help one to realize that we cannot stop everything to deal with the problem of hermeneutics but that we must deal with it "on the run." The results must constantly be tested in the midst of the community in its relation to the world. For the community itself to enter into the exegetical and homiletical process, the specialist must exercise his skill as a genuine leader rather than as a dogmatist.

The concept of the hermeneutical community includes also an epistemological dimension. The hermeneutical question is shifted from "What does the text mean to me?" to the more basic question, "What does the text mean to us?" Slight as this shift may seem, it emphasizes that the Bible is a *public* book. It is to be used and interpreted within its own public life situation. Therefore its historical and sociopolitical dimensions, as well as its psychological implications, are a part of its relevant theological message. Otherwise, if the Bible is seen only as a book for private devotions, an adequate hermeneutics becomes impossible.

I do not want to minimize the difficulties of the movement back-

ward to the Bible and forward to the twentieth century. But by accepting the congregation as the context for the Bible's life situation, the process is quite a different one from that in which it is assumed that there is no twentieth-century life situation in which the Bible is truly at home. If the latter is true, the hermeneutical process is indeed questionable and largely meaningless. It is only within the life situation of the hermeneutical community that the fundamental analogies are experienced which make the Bible historically credible.

A Biblical Unity

There is a tendency on the part of some modern Mennonites to disregard the Old Testament. The Old Testament is essential, however, to an understanding of the New. This is true not only because the Old Testament community provides the cultural womb for the New Testament, but even more because of the nature of the biblical faith itself. We cannot understand a reality outside our own previous experience, except by a process of analogy in which similarities and differences stand out. The biblical faith, however, witnesses to certain once-for-all prophetic-historic events that never happened elsewhere and which, therefore, have no analogies outside the biblical stream of history. The history of biblical scholarship is replete with perversions of the biblical faith caused by interpreting the unique, unrepeatable event in the light of the repeatable events (mythologies or philosophies) of surrounding cultures. The "sacral kingship school" of Old Testament science has attempted to reinterpret Israel's origins in terms of the state structures which surrounded Israel (Hooke, 1958). The "mystery religions school" of New Testament science has tried to reinterpret the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection in terms of death and resurrection as celebrated by the mystery religions of the Graeco-Roman Empire (Angus, 1925). Anselm in his theory of the atonement used pagan analogies that have distorted the biblical view of atonement in orthodoxy and Fundamentalism to this day. Bultmann, captivated by Heidegger's existentialism, follows a similar method (Neill, 1964: 228 ff.). But one cannot capture the biblical reality in the mythologies or philosophies of this world without paganizing the biblical faith. If this is true, and if we can understand something new to us only by analogy, where are the analogies by which we may understand the biblical faith?

Our answer is that the biblical stream of history provides its own analogies; this is the importance of the biblical understanding of promise and fulfillment and of typology.⁵ When the New Testament

church looked for analogies by which to understand the Christ event, they went to the Old Testament: "This is that which was spoken. . . ." No doubt Jesus' own self-understanding was largely shaped by Old Testament analogy. The Old Testament was indispensable for the early Christians not only because it was the matrix for the New Testament community's culture, but because through the Scripture they experienced that newness of the Word of God, which provided analogies for the understanding of the unique event that had happened among them. It is only by use of these analogies within the stream of biblical history that we can escape from a paganization of the Jesus event.

The Old Testament is necessary, however, not only to provide analogies for the faith event, but also because the great themes of the faith, such as the understanding of God, the understanding of the world (creation), sin and salvation, mankind and peoplehood, are presented as continuities in the two Testaments (Brunner, 1963). The New Testament event may alter the character of some of these emphases, but the continuities are dominant, and without the Old Testament we cannot fully understand these themes.

It is also true that the Old Testament is to be understood in the light of the New. But this presupposition is not a dogma to be enforced by an allegorical method. If we merely read the thought of the New Testament back upon the Old, we deny the value of the Old Testament. When, however, we view the Old Testament narrative within the context of the Near East, with its historic struggle between assimilation to and rejection of that culture, it becomes evident that the New Testament as fulfillment is no longer an arbitrary dogma. As a result of biblical research, one can now say that while the Old Testament developed in the ancient Near Eastern environment and the New Testament within the Graeco-Roman environment, neither was really at home in its environment. Both were closer to each other than they were to their environments. Both are to be interpreted in the light of each other, rather than in the light of their environments, though these environments are important to their understanding.

The Bible in the Context of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean World

Since the time of the church fathers it has become traditional to contrast Jerusalem with Athens. Such a contrast of the Bible with its environment is much more ancient than the Hebrew-Greek clash,

however, for in fact it goes back to pre-kingship Israel. This ancient contrast is not so well known, however, because until recently, ancient Near Eastern history was unknown. The Old Testament jutted into the modern world like a rocky promontory from the past; readers of the Bible knew next to nothing of the environment with which it interacted. Thanks to archaeology and the discovery of ancient libraries, this isolation no longer exists. Today the volume of the ancient Accadian literature is at least as great as that of the Greek and Latin literature which has come down to us. This means that we are able not only to compare the Bible with Athens, but to compare the entire story from Abraham through Jesus and Paul with the Near East and Graeco-Roman world. With this larger perspective, we can observe not only the Bible's rejection of outside cultural items, but also its assimilation of many of them.

In contrasting the Bible with its environment, scholars have usually emphasized formal differences. For example, William Klassen has called attention to Auerbach's judgment of the literature of Greek antiquity: "We are forced to conclude that there could be no serious literary treatment of everyday occupations and social classes . . . of everyday customs and institutions . . . in short, of the people and its life. Linked with this is the fact that the realists of antiquity do not make clear the social forces underlying the facts and conditions which they present" (Auerbach, 1957:27). Over against this the literature of the Bible "portrays something which neither the poets nor the historians of antiquity ever set out to portray: the birth of a spiritual movement in the depths of the common people, from within the everyday occurrences of contemporary life, which thus assumes an importance it could never have assumed in antique literature. (Auerbach, 1957:37). This difference of form is obviously connected with the content, however, and it is questionable whether emphasis on merely formal categories can adequately portray the real contrasts.

Scholars have also emphasized the formal category of history in attempting to distinguish the Bible from the Near East. Mowinckel makes a typical statement: "While the other peoples experienced the deity in the eternal cyclic process of nature, the Israelites experienced God in history."⁶ Certainly there is some truth in this statement, but it is misleading as a generalization. Clearly the gods of the Near Eastern states participated in their people's history also, since they were always considered decisive in the fighting of wars. For example, Assyrian art provides us with an example of the divinity fighting alongside the king. In a relief of Ashurnasirpal there is a complete conformity between the

warlike movements of the god and the king. Before the battle, king and god advance with bow drawn toward the enemy. After the battle, both have their bows slung in celebration of victory (Mendenhall, 1973: Figs. 10-13). Thus, we cannot say that Yahweh acts in history and that gods do not act in history. The point is rather to observe *how* Yahweh acts in history as compared to the gods.

The Bible's Self-Consciousness

We are on safer ground for comparative work when we let Israel speak for herself. What was Israel's own self-consciousness of her difference from the nations?

The ancient poetry of the Pentateuch reveals that Israel was strongly aware of such a difference: "Lo, a people dwelling alone, and not reckoning itself among the nations!" (Numbers 23:9, RSV). This self-consciousness is delineated again and again, in the oldest as well as the more recent sources. For example one of the oldest sources of the Pentateuch contrasts Yahweh's call of Abraham with the self-willed character of the primitive democracy of a Babylonian city state (Genesis 11 and 12, tenth century BC). The Book of Hosea, a polemic of Yahwism against Baalism, concludes with an attack on kingship as rebellion against Yahweh, although it is fitting to Baal.

This polemic against kings is found throughout the Bible: Yahweh against Pharaoh in the escape from Egypt (Exodus 1-15); Yahweh against Sennacherib (Isaiah 37:23-29, eighth century BC); Yahweh against the king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:4-21, seventh or sixth century, BC); Yahweh against the prince and king of Tyre (Ezekiel 28:1-19, sixth century BC). Outside of Israel, kingship was considered as "let down from heaven," a blessing of the gods (Pritchard, 1969: 265). Within Israel, kingship was regarded as human rebellion, a rejection of the rule of Yahweh (whose will was communicated not through the king, but through His prophets) to become "like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8; 12; cf. Judges 8:22,23; 9:7-15; Deuteronomy 17:14-20).

William McKane has shown how the problem of political power was at the heart of the prophetic conflict with the political wisdom of the ancient Near East. The prophet's

main concern is not that power should be stripped of the fearful crudity and grossness of which it partakes in the awful insecurity of our world—the world of the twentieth century. He does not principally work for the refinement or ratification of power, for this implies gradualism and is a political rather than a prophetic

solution. The prophet urges rather that the concept of a balance of power is unreal, because it leaves God out of the reckoning. The Israelite prophets and the contemporary prophets assert that power is not built in with historical existence in the way that the statesmen suppose. God reserves all power to himself and so the *locus* of power is outside historical existence. From this flowed the doctrine of instrumentality in the Israelite prophets. God moves the nations like pawns on a chess-board, but he is the only real policy-maker and reserves all power to himself.

In this case the statesman ought not to concern himself with power, for, if this is the situation, all that is left for him as for the rest of us is to know the will of God and do it. Beyond this everything rests with God. The statesman will say that the crudity of the balance of power in our world today is a true reflection of the tensions and perilous insecurity of the international community and that it is the unresolved, intractable problems, daunting in their magnitude and delicacy, which will have to be tackled and solved one by one before there is any betterment. But the prophet believes that faith has a creative potential and can transform a situation. If we had faith in God and loved our neighbour and were prepared to take the absolute risk for the sake of Christ, the world would cease to be an armed camp. (McKane, 1965: 129 f.)⁷

Yahweh's law and leadership were not experienced through an office of institutionalized violence, but in the reality of covenant relationship and worship, and in the office of the prophet who communicated the divine will to the people. This revolutionary kind of government reached its climax in the suffering servant of II Isaiah who went out to win the nations for Yahweh, armed only with Yahweh's word (North, 1956). That his enterprise ended with suffering and death and that it is this psalm of suffering and death which was decisive for the early church's understanding of Jesus shows that both Old and New Testaments are dealing primarily with the problem of political power.⁸

Jesus' own self-consciousness in relation to the nations had to do precisely with the question of leadership and the exercise of power. Jesus declared to His disciples, "Among pagans it is the kings who lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are given the title Benefactor. This must not happen with you. No; the greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves. For who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely? Yet here am I among you as one who serves!" (Luke 22:24-27, *The Jerusalem Bible*; cf. Mark 10:41-45; Mat-

thew 20:24-28) The unity of this saying with Jesus' words about the cross should be obvious. The self-consciousness which set off both Old and New Testaments from the nations had to do with the question of political power. The Bible's radical answer to this central question of power gave new structure to the biblical faith and new form to the literature.

This suggests that in our study of the Bible we must interest ourselves in more than the theology of the Bible. Biblical sociology, politics, and psychology are essential to the understanding of the biblical God. Israel had no concept of separation of church and state. Yahweh was Lord of her entire life. Her concept of separation was not between religious life and secular life, but between herself and the nations. Israel was different from the nations, though she was tempted to become like the nations. This difference of Israel from the nations is the Old Testament paradigm for the "separation" of church and state.

The Kingdom of God and History

Israel testified that this self-conscious difference from the nations was not due to her own acts, but to the action of God in her behalf: "Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?" (Deuteronomy 4:33, 34, RSV)

In my opinion the possibility of independent structures for the faithful church stands or falls with the question of the relation of the biblical tradition to the historical event to which it points. If biblical tradition has no fundamental relationship to historical event, then faith today has no real relationship to history either, and we are doomed to a kind of spiritualism which the Bible abhors. Biblical faith claims that God acted in history for the salvation of mankind. If God did not so act in history, then biblical faith is a fraud.

This raises the question of historical method. The significant difference in Old Testament historical method does not lie between Martin Noth and John Bright,⁹ but between Noth and Gerhard von Rad. Von Rad argues for the omniscience of the analogy of historical event as the fundamental basis of modern biblical criticism.¹⁰ This means that to understand the rise of Israel the historian must get

behind the unique claims of the Exodus and Sinai traditions to show that the real history of Israel's beginnings was more or less the same as the origin of nations elsewhere. In von Rad's view, any uniqueness in Israel's religion was not caused by the juncture of word and deed in an actual theo-historical event, but by theological reflection which reconstructed past history.

In contrast to von Rad, Martin Noth writes:

Yet in spite of all these historical connections and possibilities for comparison, "Israel" still appears a stranger in the world of its own time, a stranger wearing the garments and behaving in the manner of its age, yet separate from the world it lived in, not merely in the sense that every historical reality has its own individual character, and therefore an element of uniqueness, but rather at the center of the history of Israel we encounter phenomena for which there is no parallel at all elsewhere, not because material for comparison has not yet come to light but because so far as we know, *such things have simply never happened elsewhere*. (Noth, 1958:2, 3; italics added)

Noth's treatment of the Reed Sea event illustrates his method. His examination of all the relevant sources of the Pentateuch uncovers much contradictory detail, but also one common agreement: the act was Yahweh's alone, and Israel did no fighting at all. This common agreement, Noth feels, is the more remarkable in the light of the contradiction in detail (Noth, 1962: 119 ff.) This evaluation and examination of the sources is as far as the historian can go, though it is evident that Noth accepts this common testimony. If one were to reject it, he would then need to explain the absurdity and tenacity of the biblical tradition, in face of overwhelming odds from ancient to modern times. A similar question about the assumptions of historical method is also involved in the quest for the historical Jesus.

The Hermeneutical Community and Miracle

The question of miracle is a crucial one, for it involves not merely peripheral events such as healings, but the fundamental events on which biblical faith rests—the Exodus and Sinai, the resurrection and present rule of God in Christ. It is my opinion that miracle is an essential element of biblical faith.

Miracle, however, is not to be understood in terms of the nineteenth-century argument between science and religion, but in terms of the biblical doctrine of creation. From this perspective,

miracle is strange and offensive not only to modern man, but to ancient man as well. Had an Egyptian or Mesopotamian thinker encountered the biblical doctrine of creation he most likely would not have understood it; had he come to understand it, he would have been shaken to the foundations, largely because of the biblical assumption of freedom. As Christopher North points out:

The concept of creation is not obvious, nor does it come naturally to mankind. Everywhere except in the Bible, interpretation of the universe is naturalistic, and worship is, in one form or another, worship of "the great god Pan." This is true of the religion of classical Greece, of "polymorphic" Hinduism, of humanism in its various forms, of the current concept of "one single branching metabolizing protoplasm," and of the popular idea of "the life force" as the creative agent in the universe. Outside biblical theism all interpretations of the universe are so many more or less refined forms of what the OT stigmatizes as the worship of Baal, Baal being conceived as the personification of the life process. (1964:14)

This concept of creation originated in Israel not as speculation on what had happened "back there," but through the present experience of the newness of Yahweh's creation of a people. This is evident from the relationship of the creation event to salvation history. In Nehemiah 9:6-37, for example, the thought of Yahweh as Creator is brought to bear upon what appears to be a frustrated salvation history, that is, Israel's slavery to the Persians. (Psalm 33; Isaiah 43:19; 65:17)

Remarkably, Israel projected the creative act of Yahweh in her own prophetic-historical experience onto Yahweh's relation to the entire universe, past, present, and future. While by His creative activity Yahweh gives order and regularity to the whole, at the same time He is making all things new in the creation of His people. There is no conflict between Yahweh's regular ordering of the seasons, and the new act of salvation history; both are based on His promise. (Genesis 8:21-22 and 12:1-3)

Yahweh's free creative act on behalf of His people was thus a promise of His creative presence both now and in the future. If we can believe in the possibility of miracle in this sense—that God is free to create something new in biblical times, in the present day, and in the future—this is of greatest consequence for a truly biblical hermeneutic, for it enables the break with the immanent cause-effect pattern of the secular historian.

The Hermeneutical Circle

We have now come full circle in our hermeneutic of the Bible. For it is only by the experience of the new creation that we can realistically affirm with the prophets “that power is not built in with historical existence in the way that statesmen suppose” and that “God reserves all power to himself and so the *locus* of power is outside historical existence” (McKane, 1965:129). The experience of creation alone will make us bold to believe—not that our faith has the creative potential to transform a situation, but that God has already acted creatively in the situation, and by our response to that act we can enter into the freedom of His suffering in making all things new.

It was faith of this character that enabled the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century to act in freedom from the power structures and political assumptions of their age. In a similar manner, Guy Hershberger challenges the “colony of heaven” to “the good fight of faith, overcoming evil with good—with love, nonresistance, and the way of the cross, even as Christ overcame the world by going to His cross” (1958d:55).

In the biblical pattern of promise and fulfillment, it is God’s new act of covenant in Christ that provides a solid bridgehead which His people may occupy in the midst of the violent history of the twentieth century, in full confidence that His creative word is the determinative power leading to the future.

1. *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* included chapters on both Old and New Testaments. Another chapter distinguished between biblical nonresistance and other types of pacifism. *The Way of the Cross in Human Relations* begins with two chapters on biblical foundations, and utilizes Scripture references throughout.

2. In some respects a case can be made that the synagogue has been closer to the teaching of Jesus than has the mainline church. *The Anchor Bible* commentary series, edited by W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman, is an example of the ecumenical character of contemporary biblical studies.

3. For discussion of Anabaptist hermeneutics, see Bender (1938), Kaufman (1951), Wenger (1938), Klassen (1966a and 1966b), and Yoder (1966).

4. See Riedemann (1970) for an example of the Anabaptist attitude toward government. Two of my former students, David Mann and Frederic A. Miller, have written papers on this subject.

5. See Zimmerli (1965); I have written a response to this book (Lind, 1966).

6. Quoted by Albrektson (1967). Albrektson's book is a criticism of this concept among Old Testament specialists. In my opinion his work does not demolish the point, but qualifies it.

7. I quote McKane at some length because he is not a pacifist nor an Anabaptist, and thus should not be suspect because of his presuppositions. McKane himself rejects the prophetic ethic in favor of the ethic of "responsibility" of ancient Near Eastern wisdom (pp. 129f.). But if McKane is correct in his contrast of these two ethics, it is then evident on which side this puts the ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr, e.g., *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. His ethic is contrary to that of the prophets and Jesus and is more in line with NE statecraft. This is the fundamental issue between the Bible and its environment; this is what Genesis 3 is about. See my unpublished paper, "The Anomaly of the Prophet."

8. For the importance of Isaiah 53 to the New Testament interpretation of Jesus, see Dodd (1965). Hooker (1959) may be successful in qualifying Dodd's thesis, but in my judgment does not demolish his argument.

9. For a statement of the differences between Bright and Noth, see Bright (1956).

10. Von Rad makes a sharp distinction between the confessional character of biblical faith and the way the events "really happened." "These two pictures of Israel's history lie before us—that of modern critical scholarship and that which the faith of Israel constructed—and for the present, we must reconcile ourselves to both of them." He holds that modern critical scholarship is "rational and 'objective'; that is, with the aid of historical method and presupposing *the similarity of all historical occurrence*, it constructs a critical picture of the history as it really was in Israel" (italics mine). In a footnote he sympathetically quotes E. Troeltsch: "The means by which criticism is at all possible is the application of analogy. . . . But the omniscience of analogy implies that all historical events are identical in principle" (1962:107).

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CANON: CREATIVE BIBLICISM
AS A HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLE

Jacob J. Enz

The complaint about atomistic exegesis has been heard clearly. One of the chief voices raising this concern is that of Jacques Ellul. In his The Meaning of the city he calls for strong attention to the books of the Bible as wholes to say nothing about the compilation of the books into the canon.¹ The composer and the compiler as well as the original author of the parts must be heard.

This principle makes room for a phenomenon which Brevard S. Childs has called the Bible's "own theological criticism."² The ancient Hebrew tradition to use Child's words, is transformed "to become a far truer testimony to God's purpose with his world."

Hermeneutically speaking, this points in the direction of a creative Biblicism. The Holy Scriptures manifest within themselves the resources for their own interpretation. This is operative within the Old Testament; it is also operative between the Testaments and within the New Testament. This approach may also permit us to enter directly into a dialogue taking place in the canon. The so-called hermeneutical bridge supposedly connecting us with the canon may not be necessary. There is an inclusiveness in the canon that embraces the totality of time in a way that provides us with an immediacy to the inner hermeneutics in the Scriptures.

This essay presents a selection of the ways by which the canon engages in dialogue on some ever-recurring issues. Among these are: the physical-spiritual issues, tradition and the new, nationalism and the kingdom of God, equality of woman with man, nationalistic and spiritual warfare, secular and kingdom charisma, and the potency of the spirit and of suffering.

1. Consider what happens when one reads the first two parts of the Hebrew canon called the Law and the Prophets. The second part of the Prophets, the prophetic anthologies, consists of four units: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (commonly known as the Minor Prophets). Gunnar Østborn has this to say about the numerical configuration three

and twelve; "...it does not seem unlikely that the prototypes of this limitation might here have been the three patriarchs and the twelve tribes, all of them being the original representatives of Israel."³ Ostborn goes on to add, "...in the critical period about the time of the Exile and during it a number of prophets evidently obtained leading positions. As far as I can see, it is plausible that some of their prominent figures were selected by tradition as representatives of a new Israel, and that, due to this, their number was fixed at fifteen, in accordance with the number of the central personalities in the history of primordial Israel."⁴ Following Ostborn, what is to prevent us from speaking of the first Israel as the Israel according to the flesh and the new Israel as the Israel according to the Spirit?

Furthermore if, in the process of time, the record of the new Israel finds its integral place alongside the record of the old Israel, the Prophets alongside the Law of Moses, then appears the phenomenon of the opening of canon and the addition of new material. The Law clearly closes with a real sense of finality in its comments about Moses: "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt..." (Deut. 34:10f.).

But it was not a reckless welding of the new to the old. There was a clear acceptance of the old as the pattern for the structuring of the new. There was clear identification with the old while the new acts of God, as spoken by the Prophets, were set forth.

This creatively critical integration of the new with the old is seen again in Jesus' strategy in gathering twelve disciples around him. It may be that the inner circle of Jesus' disciples, the three, alongside of the twelve is deliberately intended by Jesus to parallel the earlier prophetic community. From this it becomes apparent that the addition of the New Testament to what was apparently a closed canon of the Old Testament may very well have had precedent in the manner in which the Prophets were appended to the Law of Moses.

2. The pattern of adding the new to the old according to the structure of the old may be seen in another way. The fivefold structure of the Torah, the Law of Moses, becomes the basis for the organization of the Psalter into five distinct parts;⁵ the

Psalter, as it were, becomes the Torah of David. The Book of Proverbs appears also to have a fivefold structure if one divides the material according to certain editorial notes.⁶ Nor is this patterning restricted to the Old Testament. The Gospel of Matthew divides the teachings of Jesus into five distinct parts concluding each with the identical formula, "when Jesus finished..."⁷ It has been pointed out that the Evangelist "means to surround the promulgation of the New Law--the Covenant of God in Christ--with the same majesty as accompanied the giving of the Law on Sinai..."⁸

3. Genealogies are also typical of both Testaments. They are another means of expressing the deep indebtedness of the New Testament writers to their Hebrew roots in the Old Testament. On the other hand they show the direction toward Christ in which the Old Testament moves. The Gospel of Matthew in its first words, "The book of the genealogy" (of Jesus Christ) uses the very words of Genesis 5:1, "the book of the generations" (of Adam).

Integral to the first book of the Bible, Genesis, is genealogy. The backbone of the book gives the rootage of the chosen people of God within the larger human family. The Book of Exodus (chapter 6) carries the genealogy from the sons of Jacob down to Moses and Aaron. The Book of Chronicles begins at the very beginning once more and traces the chosen family through Abraham and David and down to the time of Cyrus and beyond.

There is a sense of completion once the genealogies reach Jesus. The "chosen generation" (1 Pet. 2:9) has been reached. Now there is no longer an extension of the family except a limited spiritual generation as when Paul speaks of Timothy as "my son" (1 Tim. 1:2, 18; 2 Tim. 1:2). It is in this terminal point of the generations that the whole story of the church since Jesus is to be seen.

4. Closely related to genealogies is the testamental form of literature. Jacob (Gen. 49) speaks words of blessing on his sons in his last hours. Similarly Moses (Deut. 33) in his last days pronounces the blessing on the twelve tribes. The pattern is resumed in the non-canonical material, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs; each of the sons of Jacob pronounces a blessing on his children. Finally, appearing to build on this literary form, the First Epistle of John bequeaths life on the "little

children" who are repeatedly addressed (1 Jn. 2:1,12, 18,28; cf. 3 Jn. 4).

Thus in genealogies and testaments a deep dependence on the Old Testament is evident. On the other hand, we witness also an unfolding of a new climactic element in the New Testament.

5. Functioning prominently in the Synoptic Gospels are two divine oracles. This literary type, conspicuously rare in the Gospels, occurs in connection with Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. Both of these events are critical turning points in Jesus' life. The first of these, the baptism, links Jesus' work with prophecy rather than with the establishment in Jerusalem. Jesus deliberately joins the austere preacher in the wilderness. At Jesus' baptism the voice from heaven speaks, "Thou art my beloved Son, with thee I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22; cf. Mt. 3:17). These are divine words of encouragement for Jesus as he sets out on his public ministry. The second of these divine oracles is intended to confirm for the disciples Jesus' words regarding his coming suffering and death which the disciples found impossible to accept (see Mk. 8:32 and Mt. 16:22). Coming at the transfiguration, these words are, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (Mk. 9:7; cf. Mt. 17:5 and Lk. 9:35).

The true force of these words in the Gospels cannot be understood apart from their sources in the Old Testament. The chief source for the "my Son" motif is Psalm 2:7 where the psalmist, the king, called "his anointed," reports:

I will tell of the degree of the Lord:
He said to me, "You are my son
today I have begotten you..."

This poem belongs among the royal psalms and may be classified specifically as a coronation hymn. The original setting is then to be seen as a highly nationalistic one. Furthermore, the psalm speaks of intense violence: "break them with a rod of iron" and "dash them in pieces" (vs. 9). The deliberate use of material from such a violently nationalistic poem to announce the coronation of the humble Jesus of Nazareth shows both the continuity and the strong discontinuity between the Testaments. It should be noted however that the discontinuity between the Testaments arises from the discontinuity already in the Old Testament. For the divine declaration at the enthronement of Jesus of Nazareth adds the words "with

thee I am well pleased"; this has its origin in Isaiah 42:1 where it is associated with the quiet, patient Servant of the Lord who according to Isaiah 53 accomplishes his mission by suffering and dying rather than by killing others.

The expression "listen to him" found in the divine oracle at the transfiguration must also be seen in the light of the Old Testament¹⁰. This may be related to the promise of a successor for Moses as given in Deuteronomy 18:15:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you from your brethren - him you shall heed....

"Him you shall heed" as applied now to Jesus gives him the stature of a Moses (present at transfiguration), something that is elsewhere affirmed in the New Testament (Acts 3:22f.). If this be true then the divine oracle (esp. as given in Matthew 17:5) draws upon the three divisions of the Hebrew canon--Law (Deut. 18:15) prophets (Is. 42:1) and writings (Ps. 2:7). This is quite illustrative of Jesus' own words as given in Luke 24:44 in connection with the walk to Emmaus:

Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled."

6. Another psalm belonging in the category of royal-coronation is Psalm 110 with its motif "at my right hand" (vs 1). As in Psalm 2 brutal nationalistic theology characterizes this poem; it speaks of the Lord as shattering kings and filling the nations with corpses (Ps. 110:5, 6). Read by itself the role of a psalm like this in the light of the Scriptures as a whole is difficult to understand. But when one sees it in the light of its New Testament use, then one gains a new clue to the dynamic unity of the Scriptures. "Right hand" turns up at some of the most unexpected places in the New Testament.¹¹ It appears in Peter's sermon at Pentecost to describe the fate of Jesus: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear" (Acts 2:32 f.). Here is none of the violence associated with military power, but rather a totally new understanding of power.

Or consider the use of the motif in the context of a number of words for power in Ephesians 1:19-22. Paul is praying that the Christians at Ephesus may know:

...what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church.

Power lies in this humanly weak little group called the church which is the veritable body of him who is seated at the right hand of God.

Hebrews 8:1f. also makes use of this motif. The humble Jesus of Nazareth becomes the high priest of the Christian; Jesus "is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven." The true power of heaven and earth concerns itself with the mediatorial work of the priestly office. The manner of coming to this position is not via earthly power but by earthly defeat, the cross (Heb. 12:2): "...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." The martial motifs of the coronation hymns are not expunged from the Christian Bible. In their interaction with the suffering Servant prophecy they are recycled for the coronation of a new kind of King.

7. There are instances where a passage in the Old Testament must be understood in the light of another passage in the Old Testament. An illustration of this type is the way in which the Song of Solomon responds to the report of the effects of the Fall as indicated in Genesis 3.¹² Phyllis Tribble works with these two passages as she examines "interactions between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Women's Liberation Movement."¹³

In many ways the Song of Solomon parallels the emphases of Genesis 2 and 3. As in the Genesis narrative¹⁴ Song of Solomon has the setting of a garden. Fountains of water (Song of Sol. 4:12,15) may be compared with the subterranean stream watering the earth (Gen. 2:6) and the rivers in Eden (Gen.

2:10-14).¹⁵ Animals are found in both gardens.¹⁶ Sensuality is to be found in both gardens.¹⁷ Work is a part of both narratives;¹⁸ both documents suggest fluidity in the occupational roles of woman and man.¹⁹ In regard to naming, roles of man and woman reverse, as the woman names man in Song of Solomon 1:3.²⁰ The mutuality of the sexes (Gen. 2) is affirmed in Song of Songs.²¹ The word desire occurs only three times in the Old Testament: twice in Genesis (3:16; 4:7) and once in Song of Solomon 7:10.²² Death is unable to swallow either couple.²³

To quote Tribble,

In many ways, then, Song of Songs is a Midrash on Genesis 2 and 3. By variations and reversals it creatively actualizes major motifs and themes of the primeval myth.... Whatever else it may be, Canticles is a commentary on Genesis 2-3. Paradise Lost is Paradise regained.²⁴

A part of the function of this commentary is to mitigate the tone of melancholy that comes as a result of the Fall where perversions of creation have resulted in male and female chauvinism.²⁵ Here is evidence of a depatriarchalizing principle, an hermeneutic operating within Scripture itself, not imposed on Scripture from without. This is indeed an illustration of how the Scriptures have anticipated the Feminist Movement. No hermeneutical bridge is necessary.

8. In Psalm 2 when the Lord empowers his anointed we encounter harsh words of nationalistic imperialism. In this coronation hymn the new king is invited to ask of the Lord and he will receive the nations as his heritage and "the ends of the earth" as his possession. Standing alone this sounds most incongruent with the New Testament which corrects this materialistic imperialism. This is probably accomplished with the help of the divine oracle of commission spoken to the Servant in Is. 49:6: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." A new kind of imperialism is set forth in the great commission in Acts 1:8. It is the imperialism of an extended witness "to the end of the earth."

The tensions between a power culture and a persuasion culture are preserved in the larger setting of the Old Testament canon. Each position is given

"equal time." The tensions are further felt in the New Testament as Jesus throws the full weight of his ministry, death on the cross and resurrection, on the side of the gospel of persuasion.

9. Another point of strongest tension even within the Old Testament itself is in the matter of Holy War.²⁶ G. von Rad has set forth definitively the typical elements in the cult of waging war: (1) the quest to discover the will of God; (2) the words of assurance; (3) the march to war in which the Lord himself does battle; (4) the need for fearlessness on Israel's part; (5) fear that throws the enemy into panic; and (6) devoting the spoils to God. John W. Miller has shown how spiritualization of Holy War takes place in Isaiah's words to King Ahaz who was fearfully²⁷ threatened by the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. "Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint" (Is. 7:4) are Isaiah's words followed by an urgent plea to believe, to have confidence in the Lord. Miller points out that just as Isaiah calls for the termination of material sacrifices so he calls for the end of physical warfare according to the traditional pattern. A further evidence of this process of spiritualization of the tradition of Holy War comes in Isaiah 53, which refers first to the arm of the Lord (53:1) in the context of triumph through suffering. At the end of the chapter (53:12) the Servant is recorded as dividing "the spoil with the strong." Here the prophecy of the Servant to which Jesus of Nazareth gives his life as fulfillment speaks of a completely transmuted²⁸ Holy War in the Old Testament itself!

10. One of the baffling elements in the Old Testament when read with reference to certain other parts of both the Old and New Testaments is the expression, "Spirit of the Lord." The first usage of the expression comes in the Book of Judges; Othniel is reported as being endowed with the Spirit of the Lord (3:10). In addition to judging, his work includes going to war. Strangely, for Samson more than any of the other judges this expression is used (Judg. 13:25; 14:6, 19; especially 15:14). Thus "Spirit of the Lord" is closely associated with brute physical strength and warfare.

In sharp contrast to this, one who appears to be the anointed Servant of the Lord testifies that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him "to bring good tidings to the afflicted...to bind up the broken-hearted, to

proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor..." (Is. 61:1f.). When Jesus reads this passage in the Nazareth synagogue he adds a nine word commentary: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:21). There is no longer any question about the true working of the Spirit of the Lord. Furthermore, the suffering which the Servant Jesus was to undergo was already in evidence when the response of his fellow townspeople almost made a Golgotha of the hill outside Nazareth.

11. In the Old Testament there are two traditions of kingship. One is expressed most clearly in Exodus and Judges. The ancient poem in Exodus 15 expresses the kingship of the Lord who has just gained victory over the Egyptian chariots: "The Lord will reign forever and ever" (15:18). One of the earliest strata of the Pentateuch speaks of Israel as a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). In the priestly stratum (Ex. 25:22) of a later period the Lord is portrayed as speaking with Moses from above the mercy seat in the holy of holies; this is indeed the throne room of Israel's invisible, though ever present king, the Lord.

From an earlier source the suggestion by the men of Israel that Gideon be their king is firmly rejected by Gideon with the words: "I will not rule over you and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you" (Judg. 8:23). Despite this strong anti-monarchical tradition and despite the protestations of Samuel the people insist on a king and their wish is granted. The picture of the kingdom in the books of Samuel and Kings shows nothing but continuous deterioration. The golden age of Solomon itself is the time of planting the seeds of later deterioration.

In captivity the true kingdom re-appears in strange places. Mordecai's words of challenge to Esther are: "And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Est. 4:14) Of all places the kingdom is still very much alive while God's chosen people are subservient to their political captors.

Similarly in captivity comes the vision of the Son of Man who receives the kingdom (Dan. 7:14). The interpretation of the vision identifies the saints of the Most High with the Son of Man after which no further reference is made to the Son of Man; the

Saints of the Most High are the ones who receive the kingdom (Dan. 7:22,27). This process involves deep suffering on the part of the saints of the Most High, yet the outcome is clear:

As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the Kingdom.

This last motif is picked up in Mark 1:15²⁹ in a one-sentence summary of Jesus' earliest preaching: "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." The setting in Mark is the same as the setting in Daniel. The coming of the kingdom involves suffering. John the Baptist is recorded as having been arrested (Mk. 1:14). The coming of the kingdom with all of its sense of assurance is set within the agonies of faithful responses in the face of the adamant religious and political establishment. That is where the kingdom is and not in the brandishing of physical force.

At one further point there is a coincidence of the word "time" and "kingdom." In Acts 1:6 just prior to the ascension the apostles inquire, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" It almost appears that the disciples have entirely missed the point of the tradition we have noted in Daniel and Mark and have moved in the direction of the Zealots. The true nature of the kingdom is shown by Jesus in the great commission which insists that the enduement with the power of the Holy spirit is for witnessing, not for waging warfare in behalf of the kingdom.

12. Exodus must not be read by itself. The motif of signs and wonders which led to faith clearly had its impact on later literature in the Bible.³⁰ The term "sign" is used in Exodus in connection with the preparation of Moses for his mission when he inquires as to whether his people in Egypt will believe him (Ex. 4:1-9). "Signs" is also used to refer to all the wonders performed by Moses and Aaron upon the Egyptians prior to the deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 10:1); the purpose of the signs is that Egypt and Israel may know the Lord. When Israel is delivered at the Sea, a summary statement declared that the people "believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses" (Ex. 14:31).

"Signs," "know," and "believe" are characteristic terms especially in the Gospel of John. John like

Exodus is built substantially around a series of signs intended to engender knowledge and issue in faith. The statement of the purpose brings to a focus this structure: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe..." (Jn. 20:30f.). The negative expression that summarizes this structure may be seen at the end of the first part of the Gospel in John 12:37: "Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him..."

But we must look beyond the comparison to the contrasts involved if we are to appreciate the Bible's own internal "theological criticism" (to use B. Childs' term referred to above). The signs of the second Moses unlike those of the first Moses, involve not making water into blood but into wine; they involve giving healing and raising from the dead, not hurting or killing the firstborn. The old tradition connected with the first Moses needed to be rewritten in the light of the second Moses, Jesus, who modeled his mission on the first re-writing of Exodus to be found in Isaiah. There the return from exile and the portrait of the suffering Servant called for a God who bears suffering rather than inflicts suffering.

Conclusion. We began this essay with the assertion that the whole of the Scriptures is essential to the adequate interpretation of the parts. We have illustrated this with a series of instances:

1. God's ultimate will for the twelve sons of Jacob is to be seen in the "twelve" prophets and the twelve disciples.

2. The fivefold basic revelation to Moses needs the fivefold Psalter, the fivefold Book of Proverbs and especially the fivefold Gospel of Matthew to be truly complete.

3. The genealogies of Matthew and Luke which focus on Jesus explicate definitively the genealogies of Genesis, Exodus, and Chronicles.

4. The testamental form of 1 John stands in a climactic relation to the testamental literature in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, as it bequeaths "life."

5. The divine oracle "Thou art my son" in the nationalistic Psalm 2 needs the divine oracles of the Synoptic Gospels spoken by God over Jesus to correct them.

6. The motif "at the right hand" in another nationalistic Psalm (110) receives its true interpretation in the enthronement of Jesus.

7. The melancholy situation of the relation between Adam and Eve after the fall is counteracted by the joy of the relation between man and woman in Song of Solomon.

8. The nationalistic imperialism in the expression "ends of the earth" in Psalm 2 is corrected to an imperialism of persuasion found in Isaiah 49 and Acts 1.

9. The old pattern of Holy War is completely transmuted already in the Old Testament in Isaiah 7 and 53 and in the New Testament in Ephesians 6.

10. The association of militarism with "Spirit of the Lord" in Judges and Samuel is a pattern that is rejected in the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 61 and in Jesus in Luke 4.

11. Kingdom as associated with worldly power in much of the Old Testament comes to be associated with suffering (Daniel) and persuasion (Mark and Acts).

12. The signs leading to faith in Exodus portrayed a God who inflicted suffering; this is rewritten in Isaiah and in John to portray the Servant and the Son as performing signs of healing and bearing suffering.

Throughout the above we see in living tension eternal Jahwistic-Christian faith and compromised temporal faith. Abiding faith in Jahweh-Christ which does not change with the centuries is seen in persistent conflict with man's typical institutions. No long hermeneutical bridge is needed.

NOTES

1. Jacques Ellul, The Meaning of the City (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. XVII. For a statement urgently calling attention to Ellul's work see Vernard Eller, "How Jacques Ellul Reads the Bible," Christian Century 89 (November 29, 1972), 1212-1215.

2. Brevard S. Childs, The Book of Exodus (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 170.

3. Gunnar Östborn, Cult and Canon (Uppsala: Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1950), p. 45.

4. Ibid.

5. Doxologies at the end of Psalms 41, 72, 89, and 106 group the Psalms into five divisions or "books."

6. Three groups of proverbs are ascribed to Solomon (1:1; 10:1; 25:1) and one group each to Agur (30:1) and Lemuel (31:1).

7. Matthew 7:28 has "finished these sayings"; in Matthew 11:1 Jesus "finished instructing his twelve disciples: Matthew 13:53 reads, "finished these parables"; and Matthew 19:1 and 26:1 return to the 7:28 phrase.

8. F. W. Green, The Gospel According to Matthew (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 5.

9. M. Dajood, Psalms, I (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 7.

10. C. H. Dodd, According to the Scriptures (London: Nisbet, 1952), p. 55.

11. In the development of the "right hand" motif I draw upon a fuller treatment which may be found in my The Christian and Warfare: the Roots of Pacifism in the Old Testament (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1972), pp. 77ff.

12. Phyllis Tribble, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," JAAR 41 (March 1973), 30-48.

13. Ibid., 30.

20. Ibid.

14. Ibid., 42.

21. Ibid., 45.

15. Ibid., 43.

22. Ibid., 46.

16. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 47.

17. Ibid., 44.

24. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 48.

19. Ibid.

26. Gerhard von Rad, Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel (Zürich, 1951).

27. John W. Miller, "'Holy War' in the Old Testament," Gospel Herald 48 (March 15, 1955), pp. 250ff.

28. I am indebted to a former teaching colleague, Chalmer Faw, for this expression.

29. C. H. Dodd, p. 69.

MODES OF APPROPRIATING THE BIBLE*

The Problem of Distance in Theological Hermeneutics

Waldemar Janzen

Introduction

When we begin to reflect about the possibility of understanding a written text--or for that matter, the living speech of our contemporaries--we have entered the realm of concern technically called "hermeneutics." While such reflection goes on in all disciplines that deal with texts or with people, its primary focus in theology is, of course, the Bible. How can this collection of writings from a different age and culture speak across the centuries and cultural barriers to us in a meaningful and relevant way?

The believer may, perhaps, confront the attempt to reflect consciously and intellectually on the possibility and the nature of bridging those gaps with an impatient assertion of fact: "The Bible has spoken meaningfully to generations of Christians, and it still speaks to me! Why intellectualize the process?!" To this, one needs to point out that one who is ready to be satisfied with unreflecting acceptance should not be surprised if s/he meets in others unreflecting rejection. If it is not necessary to give account for the claim that the Bible "still speaks to us today," it seems equally justified to assert without reflection that it "has no meaning for our time."

If we stress the need for conscious reflection here, however, it is not meant to imply that the Bible speaks to us only after we have arrived at an adequate hermeneutical theory. An analogy may illustrate the place of conscious hermeneutical reflection: In order to understand a person in the totality of his or her

*Readers with limited background in philosophy may want to read a shortened, simplified version of the essay, ch. 4 in the collection of Waldemar Janzen's essays, Still In The Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology; IMS Series No. 6 (Newton, Ks.: Faith and Life Press, 1982), pp. 27-38.

being we might do best to live with that person for a while and to absorb intuitively the impression of his or her personality on us. However, if a particular question should arise, like the person's ability to drive a truck, a conscious inquiry about his or her chauffeur's license and driving record may reveal what a month of living together might never have shown. Hermeneutical theory is no substitute for persistent and expectant Bible reading, but it serves some functions not performed by intuition and it is--unlike intuition--communicable. For the latter reason teachers and preachers will, sooner or later, with greater or lesser persistency, ask some of the hermeneutical questions overtly.

While these questions have been asked continuously since the time of the early Rabbis and the first Christian exegetes, the rise of historicist thinking in the 18th and 19th centuries gave the task of hermeneutics a new prominence. As the dispassionate modern historian came to see the past in all its strangeness and distance, the consciousness of a gap between the ancient Scriptures and their contemporary reader demanded ever greater bridge-building. But when, in our own century, the apparently detached and dispassionate historian was recognized as being himself a part of the flux of history, i.e. when historicism was seen to be itself a time-bound Western mental stance, the task of hermeneutics widened out even more so as to embrace the comprehensive question as to who we are; it became synonymous with ontology.

I. A Survey of Hermeneutical Approaches

Our brief survey can neither catalogue the variety of hermeneutical approaches fully nor nuance their distinctiveness sufficiently. It will consist, therefore, of a sampling selected to set forth certain distinctive attempts of interpreters to bridge the temporal and cultural distance between the Bible and their own time. Our primary organizing principle shall be the question whether an interpreter or movement faced this distance seriously as having to be traversed, or whether such an interpreter or school employed some device to collapse the distance so as to make past and present essentially contemporaneous.

In analogy to modern means of transportation we shall speak of "ground routes" and "air routes"

between the Bible and our time. While every hermeneutical approach contains, no doubt, some valuable insights, and while no comprehensive judgment is intended, certain preferences on the part of the writer will appear as we proceed. If our groupings should result in unexpected or even seemingly incompatible associations, it should be kept in mind that we suggest such similarity in one respect only, namely with respect to the treatment of "distance."²

A. "Air Routes"

1. Abiding Law: Rabbinic Judaism...Christian Moralism

Rabbinic Judaism of New Testament times and later understood the Old Testament as a guide for life, valid in detailed application to subsequent ages. The words spoken to the Israelites at Moses' or Jeremiah's time were to be heard by Jews living centuries later as a demand upon them. As this resulted in obvious incongruities of situation, the science of adapting the biblical statements to later needs had to be developed, a process which can be seen in³ the Mishnah, the Talmud, and other Rabbinic literature.

The critique leveled against the Rabbis cannot be aimed at their desire to make Scripture relevant; it must be aimed at the fragmentation of Scripture in the process. The complex and profound revelation of God's grace during the exodus from Egypt and the resultant covenant relationship between God and Israel could no longer be appreciated in their coherence and in their significant order of God's grace followed by human response of obedience. Instead, small segments were asked to yield self-contained meanings to be carried over to limited areas of later life. Out of the Law came laws.

In the history of the church this approach has appeared again and again, often at those points where great reverence for the words of the biblical text led to a preoccupation with short excerpts from Scripture, to the neglect of its major themes. The Reformation's concern for the Word placed the Bible into the center of Protestant life, but this very attempt to make it "food for every day" led to its fragmented distribution and consumption: detailed exegesis of a

short sermon text; meditation on a brief passage for daily devotions; concentration on one short story during Sunday school hour, a story expected to carry its message within its short self. Unless the teacher or preacher is very skillful in placing the story or text into a broader context by preserving the main themes from Sunday to Sunday, each short unit will become a "hero-villain" story leaving the hearer with the command to do as good Abraham and not as bad Lot, or as good David and not as bad Saul. In other words, a "do-don't" application, a legalism or moralism, has resulted.

2. Abstracted Truth: Philo...Medieval Allegorizing...Liberal Theology

A different avenue toward relevance had its origin in Judaism also, but became prominent in the Christian Church during its first several centuries and dominated Bible interpretation during the Middle Ages. When Philo and others found it necessary to interpret Judaism to the Greek world, they attempted to present it to the philosophical Greek mind as a different, though legitimate philosophy. As the Bible consists of very tangible and concrete stories very dissimilar from philosophical speculations, this could only be achieved by attributing to the biblical stories hidden "spiritual" meanings. Job's camels and sheep now became his good and evil thoughts, etc. This is allegorizing, and its product an allegory, a story that appears to say one thing but means another.

It is important to note here that the "truth" contained in a biblical text is thought to be detachable from the concrete features of the text. In the Protestant Liberalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century we find a similar assumption, and again it is prompted by the desire to make the Bible palatable to a different mental climate. Truths such as the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of men, and the infinite value and immortality of the soul were not seen as the abstracted gains of Bible interpretation. These were congruent, it was held, with the "mind of Jesus," as contrasted with the details of the records or the accretions of churchly interpretation, much as liberal interpreters were interested in technical historical data from a purely scholarly perspective.

It is tempting to see Bultmann's "demythologizing" as a further instance of abstracting general truths from the more vivid and concrete--according to him, mythological--accounts of the New Testament. To do so would be justified, in part, and yet it seems more proper to consider Bultmann in our next section, for reasons to be discussed there.

If Rabbinic Judaism and its legalistic-moralistic counterparts treasured the biblical detail but lost sight of the wider perspective, the "detachable truth" approach of Philo, Medieval allegorizing, and modern Liberalism cannot be criticized on this count. Its strength is its striving for comprehensiveness of horizon. Its vulnerability arises from the fact that it needs to depart from the biblical medium. It abandons the confessional recital of the acts of God in the history of Israel, of Jesus Christ and of the church, in favor of philosophically formulated truths, even if supposedly distilled from Scripture. To the extent that the medium is the message, the loss of the medium must mean a loss of the message. But even if we admit that the message can be translated to some extent from one medium to another, the attempts at such translation have proved to be open gates for the prevailing philosophies, whether they were Neo-Platonism, idealism, or Existentialism.

3. Common Humanity: Schleiermacher... Dilthey... Bultmann... Barth(?)

Schleiermacher, more than anyone else, deserves to be called the father of modern philosophical as well as theological hermeneutics.⁴ From the multiplicity of specialized and methodical rules for interpretation devised over the centuries he turned to the deeper question: How is it possible to understand another human being?

That such a question was necessary, however, was the result of the spreading historicist sense of estrangement from the past, an estrangement which had given up the hope of agreement with the past on subject matter and could only hope to "understand" bygone ages "historically," i.e. on their own terms, in their strangeness from modern man.

Schleiermacher found a common denominator between a speaker or writer on the one hand, and his hearer or reader on the other, in their common psychological

constitution. Behind each text stands an author who shares with the interpreter the same basic human personality structure, and it becomes the interpreter's task to read in the words of the text the clues to that personality, a personality most closely tied up with and therefore revealed by language. If the text provides only sparing clues, the interpreter must draw on his knowledge of human nature to provide what is lacking for an empathetic recreation of the author's intention.

Such psychological divining of the mind of another--more an art than a method--must be controlled by comparing the author with others of significant similarity to him, so as to ascertain his individuality in comparison with them. While it is a misrepresentation, therefore, to ascribe to Schleiermacher utter subjectivity of feeling without any controls arising from history, it is important for our purpose here to note that the assumption of a common personality structure allows for a psychological leap across historical distances and cultural differences. Bible interpretation, which provided the impetus for Schleiermacher's hermeneutical concern, proceeds according to the same dynamics of understanding that characterize interpretation generally.

It becomes necessary here to mention Wilhelm Dilthey,⁵ even though his efforts were philosophical and not chiefly concerned with Bible interpretation: first, because he has been the interpreter of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical thought for later times and, second, because he extended the meaning of hermeneutics to embrace the totality of understanding.

Steeped in the historicism of von Ranke, Droysen, and others, and under the impact of the methodology of the natural sciences, though bracing himself against their domination of the humanities, Dilthey set out to produce a critique of historical reason, as Kant before him had undertaken a critique of natural reason. While Schleiermacher had been concerned with the understanding of texts from the past, notably the biblical text, Dilthey asked more comprehensively how it can be possible to think historically, i.e. to understand life as shown forth in all its verbal and non-verbal documents. The answer lay, for Dilthey, in the historical nature of human experience.

The one who makes history and the one who interprets history share as a common denominator their capacity for historical experience (Erlebnis), a capacity which Dilthey understood in analogy to biographical experience. As one recognizes his or her individual human life as forming an organically interrelated whole, organized around certain experiences of outstanding significance, so the totality of human life, or history, can be understood from within, as it were. While no one individual experiences the cohesion or organic wholeness of the larger segments of life in the same way as one experiences autobiographical existence, Dilthey believes that logical subjects, such as the generation or the nation, can be postulated as the subjects of such historical experience of the organic cohesion of the whole, in analogy to the biographical experience of the individual. To what extent he was successful in establishing a philosophical basis for the historical thinking of the humanities (Geisteswissenschaften) is not our concern here. For our purposes we note the introduction again of a universally shared quality of humanity--the very capacity for historical experience--to collapse the distances of time and culture and to effect the contemporaneity of all of history for historically reflective man/woman.

Like Schleiermacher and Dilthey, Rudolf Bultmann sets out from a strong awareness of the otherness of the past.⁶ The New Testament--not to mention the Old, which he considers a history of failure--speaks in mythological language, while the modern mind accepts a view of history understood to be a closed causal continuum as axiomatic. To make the New Testament understandable to this modern person, it must be divested of its mythological expression--"demythologized." But would that not destroy its meaning also? No, says Bultmann, for beneath the mythological language lies the question concerning God or, which is the same for Bultmann, concerning the meaning of existence, a question which is basic to every person and which, therefore, forms a common denominator between the past and the present. Therefore it is possible to penetrate beneath the mythological language in which the New Testament speaks to this question, and to receive its claims as claims upon us today also. But in what language or thought forms can this message now be clothed?

Of course, in those which give most adequate modern formulation to the nature of human existence, and these were provided, for Bultmann, by Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of being, as presented in his Sein und Zeit. The philosophical categories of Heideggerian existentialism, then, supply the structure, and perhaps--against Bultmann's protestations--the straight jacket, within which the New Testament is to be heard today.

Whether Karl Barth should be mentioned at this point is a question. In the 1921 preface to his commentary on Romans he makes a statement that reminds one of Schleiermacher: "Intelligent comment means that I am driven on till the document seems hardly to exist as a document; till I have almost forgotten that I am not its author; till I know the author so well that I allow him to speak in my name and am even able to speak in his name myself."⁷ His existentialist immediacy of encounter with the Word of God and the secondary role ascribed by him to church history as a theological discipline⁸ would certainly justify us in characterizing his hermeneutics as an "air route," but his demand for a theological understanding of the Bible from within faith forbids any recourse to some common aspect of humanity as the device to bridge the gap between past and present. The only possible hermeneutic appropriate to Barth's position would have to be a revealed hermeneutic. Consequently, he has never undertaken a systematization of his hermeneutics, though his writings have provided perhaps the most basic impetus in our century for a reconsideration of the meaning of the Bible for today.¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer puts it well when he says: "The grand and monumental work of Karl Barth, his Church Dogmatics, contributes to the hermeneutical problem nowhere in particular and indirectly everywhere."¹¹

Our critique of this last group of thinkers can certainly not be directed at their search for some aspect of common humanity as that which makes understanding across the centuries possible. If ancient writers had been beings essentially different from us, understanding would be as inconceivable as it is now between animals and people. Without embracing Heidegger's philosophy as such, one can appreciate his famous "hermeneutical circle" with its insistence on the need for a pre-understanding (Vor-Struktur), if understanding is to result.¹² Our critique must,

instead, be directed against the manner in which these thinkers short-circuit the historical process, understood as theological movement through time towards an eschatological goal. This is so in spite of their (variously understood) affirmations of the historical nature of man and woman and the eschatological orientation of their existence, for these terms have themselves become in their mouths quasi-mythical and timeless categories.

B. "Ground Routes"

The avenues to relevant appropriation of the Bible for our time outlined so far, could be compared to sweeping arcs that span, in grand manner, the distance between the Bible and the present. They largely ignore, or attribute little significance to, the intervening ages. Mosaic law becomes law for today; biblical stories yield "truths" to be accepted today; a common humanity allows the present to tune in on the past. We turn now to those approaches that move "by ground route" from biblical history through church history to the present.

1. Progress: Lessing...Herder...Hegel¹³

A first thrust in this direction begins in the period of Enlightenment and--significantly, as we shall see--grows on the fringes of mainline Christianity. The thinkers of that period were concerned with history, though they took a rather detached and critical stance towards it. They were concerned to preserve distance between benighted bygone ages and their enlightened present in which universal reason had come to a fruition not known before and was about to free itself from the shackles of the particulars of history.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, great German man of letters, might be taken as a worthy representative. The thought that God, conceived as universal Reason, should have manifested himself through the time-bound and often repulsive events told in the Old Testament, was quite unacceptable to him. Nevertheless, he could not shake off the problem of the origins of Christianity, bitter as his attacks on the Christian theologians became at times, until he found a

solution: In his Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts (1780)¹⁴ he developed the argument that God had condescended to manifest himself to crude times in crude ways, appropriate to the "childhood of the race," in order to educate humanity to ever greater maturity and refinement, when it would have left behind it the cruder stages and would arrive at a universal and rational religion.

While the Enlightenment saw such an educative process as a means to dissociate its own age, as the higher level, from the less advanced preceding stages, romanticism embraced a similar model of maturation of humanity, but with differently placed value accents. If Lessing saw in the childhood of the race the lowly starting point from which divine pedagogy could lead to ever greater enlightenment, Johann Gottfried Herder dwelt upon that childhood lovingly with intuitive and aesthetic appreciation.¹⁵ Not the enlightened end product, but the innocence of childhood deserved admiration, and each stage of development should be accorded its own justification and appreciation.

Much greater has been the impact of Hegel's view of history on the understanding of the significance of biblical history for modern man.¹⁶ Like Lessing, he saw the past, including the biblical past, as linked to the present through a continuous process of historical movement, a movement in the course of which the Spirit comprehended and transcended more and more of the specifics of nature, so as to emerge from the time-bound specifics of history to ever greater universality. As Lessing, Hegel also accorded biblical history and its subsequent unfolding in Christianity a place of special prominence unsurpassed by any other religion, yet penultimate to the final self-manifestation of absolute Spirit, the pinnacle of Hegel's pyramidal structure of reality. While this penultimate stage still requires, and rightly so, a metaphysical other comprehended in faith, the final transfiguration as absolute Spirit, apprehended in speculative philosophical thought, is monistic.

Hermeneutics is, for Hegel, not a subsidiary discipline, but in substance--if not in terminology--his total concern. For as Gadamer puts it: Hegel's philosophy of the Spirit claims to effect a total mediation between history and the present.¹⁷ And it was not the externally restituted past--whether restituted to present awareness psychologically or in any other way--but the recognition of the past as

present and as comprehensively and continuously effective in and constitutive of the present. That such a teleological movement can be understood speculatively only in reverse, i.e. from the standpoint of the achieved goal--for Hegel, the completed self-transformation of history into absolute Spirit--is a logical necessity that, as Gadamer has shown, seems speculatively unassailable.¹⁸ If it is, nevertheless, not fully satisfying, a fact to which a persistent stream of criticism--to wit, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and others--testifies, a new and wider basis than speculative thought must be found to supersede Hegel. It is at this point where most recent philosophical hermeneutics has its "Anknüpfungspunkt." We shall have to return to it below.

In contrast to the "air route" approaches outlined earlier, such a "ground route" connection between the Bible and the present ties biblical history and the history within which we stand into one coherent movement, thus making us a part of the process proclaimed in the Bible. The problem created for us, however, lies in the fact that biblical history is swallowed up into world history as the lines between biblical history, ancient world history, church history and modern history fade in favor of one grand movement of history, frequently with pantheistic overtones. It is not accidental that these approaches often grew on the fringes of historic Christianity and that Christians among their advocates had to strain their understanding of "Christian" to the utmost. Nevertheless, these attempts raise the extremely acute question of the relation between sacred history and universal history, between the particularity of biblical revelation and the universality of truth.

2. "Heilsgeschichte": von Hofmann...Cullmann

A second "ground route" approach to Scripture is associated with the term Heilsgeschichte, "salvation history," and is generally traced to the German Lutheran theologian Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann and the so-called "Erlangen School" of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Von Hofmann distinguishes between the world history on the one hand and the

history of Israel, of Jesus and of the church on the other. The latter is a "sacred history," a special strand of history through which God manifests himself to a select group, though for the purpose of showing the way to salvation for the whole world.

In the tradition of Schleiermacher, von Hofmann holds that biblical hermeneutics stands within the laws of general hermeneutics, and that the latter must presuppose a certain degree of psychological community between author and interpreter which makes an empathetic understanding possible across time. "After all, he who interprets retraces the thoughts which another has thought before him."²⁰ However, the specific task of the Christian interpreter arises from the question with which s/he approaches the Bible, namely the question concerning its meaning in its totality. S/he confronts the Bible as a unity and asks concerning the meaning of this unity, while general hermeneutics normally directs itself to smaller units and constructs them as evidence for more comprehensive life manifestations.

Von Hofmann, then, explicitly posits a pre-judgment (Vorurteil) on the basis of faith, concerning the nature and unity of Scripture, a pre-judgment which is expected to authenticate itself. This faith, on the basis of an experienced reality of salvation (Heilsgegenwart), pre-judges the history that led up to it as a history of salvation (Heilsgeschichte), a process of the realization of the essential will of God ("Verwirklichung des wesentlichen Willens Gottes").²¹ It is in this characterization of Scripture (and in a sense church history) as salvation history, that its unity consists. In its specifics no conformity is superimposed on it, however, and the unity can be observed only in a--cautiously applied--typological relationship between events that may lie far apart in time and circumstances.

Certain affinities to Lessing's and Hegel's developmental philosophies of history are evident here, particularly the teleological movement from particularity toward increasing universality or, theologically, from promise to ever greater fulfillment. However, this movement for von Hofmann, has not reached as yet its goal of universal comprehension, so that salvation history remains for now a narrow current within the broad stream of universal history.

The relationship between salvation history and general world history has been treated in some detail by Oscar Cullmann, in his Christ and Time (1946). Cullmann, one of the more prominent exponents of Heilsgeschichte in our century, insists that this salvation history is by no means irrelevant for world history. On the contrary, it represents the theological goal of the latter, and as such it is from the vantage point of Heilsgeschichte alone that universal history gains ultimate meaning. But this "Christian absolute norm is itself also history and is not, as is the philosophical norm [of the philosophies of history], a transcendent datum that lies beyond all history."²²

In spite of such attempts to interrelate salvation history and world history, Heilsgeschichte theology is perceived by many as asserting a dichotomy between God's general government of the world and special leading of the elect. In a climate of thought pervaded by the almost axiomatic assumption of a monistic world such an apparent duality is rejected in many quarters as offensive. The theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, to be considered shortly, is again addressing itself to this problem.

II. The Present Situation

1. Beyond the "Earlier" Heidegger and Bultman: The New Hermeneutic

By "present situation" I mean here the development of hermeneutics beyond the "earlier" Heidegger and Bultmann, in philosophy and theology, respectively. The impetus for much that follows was the identification, on Heidegger's part, of existence with the linguistic. Language was to be seen as the all-embracing reality. Language is not the expression of an underlying reality, but itself that which creates reality. Man/woman is characterized most adequately when seen in their "linguisticity."²³

While Bultmann himself, indebted to the earlier Heidegger though he was, did not move into this new philosophical phase, certain of his students saw in it new possibilities. The church historian Gerhard Ebeling characterized church history as "the history of the interpretation of Holy Scripture,"²⁴ while

the New Testament scholar Ernst Fuchs came to see in Jesus a language event (Sprachereignis; cf. Ebeling: Wortgeschehen).²⁵ In this formulation Fuchs attempted to break through the impasse between event and interpretation which had characterized Bible interpretation since Martin Kähler and had led Bultmann to reject every search for the "historical Jesus." If, for Bultmann, the New Testament in demythologized form confronted modern man/woman existentially with a call to authentic existence, it lays claim now, according to the New Hermeneutic of Fuchs, Ebeling, and others, on modern man/woman as a language event giving to us authentic language as a gift and a claim. We cannot really invent language; we find it or, perhaps better, it finds us, for it precedes us, addresses us and calls us toward authentic linguisticity. To understand the word event means to accept it; Verständnis means Einverständnis, or nothing at all. A fatalistic subjection to the--linguistically mediated--past confronts us here, and at the same time a new existentialism, an "air route," certainly, in our metaphorical classification.

Certain intentions of the New Hermeneutic become immediately apparent. First, in continuity with Heidegger and Bultmann these efforts seek to escape the tyranny of Positivism by opposing the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy through a phenomenologically based ontology. Acknowledging that neither a mythological nor a scientific world view answers our deepest existential questions, Fuchs regards authenticity-in-linguisticity as a saving alternative to the threat of succumbing in both spirit and language to an ever more tyrannicizing Positivism.²⁶ Second, the New Hermeneutic tries to advance beyond the Bultmannian dichotomy between history (Historie) and kerygma.

The liabilities of the New Hermeneutic have been hit most centrally and devastatingly by Hans Jonas' brilliant critique of the usefulness of Heideggerian philosophy for theology.²⁷ He sees in Heidegger's philosophy a paganized Christian theology which is now, deferentially(!) re-imported again by its theological devotees as the ultimate in philosophical

insight to undergird theology. Jonas pleads passionately, as a Jew with Christians(!), to see through the fatalistic paganism of Heidegger and to learn from him only about the world, a world dominated by the fallen powers, a world in need of salvation. But what we cannot learn from him--but is ever so important to maintain--is God's transcendence over this world. We must guard jealously God's sovereign claim over this immanent system. One should notice, in particular, the inability of Heideggerian philosophy to provide (1) a criterion for morally assessing the calls from being or linguisticity--for distinguishing between Jesus Christ and Hitler, to be blunt--and its inability (2) to deal with the phenomenon of non-human nature. In addition to these basic criticisms, which include Bultmann in their aim as well, one might register--in a much lower key, but deeply felt--a strong protest against the scandalous gymnastics with language in which these protagonists of linguisticity indulge!

2. Hans-Georg Gadamer

Parallel to the concerns for a language-based ontology which occupied the later Heidegger--and Fuchs and Ebeling as well--moves the thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose philosophical hermeneutic Wahrheit und Methode (1960)²⁸ is undoubtedly the most impressive recent publication in the field. Gadamer has recognized that Heidegger's renewed quest for an ontology of being, though immediately directed against Cartesian objectivism and of Positivism, was in the end a confrontation with speculative Idealism, i.e., with Hegel. Heidegger and Hegel are the starting points for Gadamer.

Hegel's philosophy of the ever more comprehensive movement of the spirit towards its absolute self-comprehension elicits both Gadamer's affirmation and critique. Speculative attacks upon it have, in Gadamer's judgment, proven self-defeating. Various attempts to assert, over against Hegel's affirmation of the comprehensive ultimacy of the spirit, the claims of the immediacy of bodily nature, of the "thou" that lays a claim upon me, of unfathomable chance, or of the realisms of economics, if made speculatively, have already been anticipated by Hegel.²⁹ Nevertheless, their claims need not be untrue, even if they lose the argument. Truth is

wider than speculation. Aspects of our being assert themselves against the reign, not only of positivistic scientism and historicism--i.e. against the tyranny of method--but also³⁰ against the sovereignty of speculative thought.

Understanding of the past cannot be commandeered from the elevated vantage point of absolute Spirit, or from that of an objectifying scientific or historical method. Understanding happens rather on the lower level of experience (Erfahrung), and this is phenomenologically evident. But when we gather experience, understanding happens as the acquisition of a negative insight against a prior assumption which is now corrected. It has the structure of: Aha, I thought it³¹ was such and so, but now I see that it is different.

Thus he who understands the past does so from a vantage point within the movement of history, a vantage point with a circumscribed horizon. If he can understand a document from the past, it is not because a common psychological structure or anything within himself subjectively or existentially experienced forms a bridge to the ancient author's similar constitution (Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Bultmann), but because he shares in a subject matter with the text, a subject matter which has come down to him historically and which provided him with the pre-judgment needed to direct the right questions at the ancient document. The past has a continuous effectiveness (Wirkungsgeschichte) which precedes me as an individual and gives to me the contents which determine my presuppositions for understanding it, and it precedes me in this way as language, for it is as language that the past becomes effective for me and determines my horizon of understanding. A common language makes it possible also that my horizon expands through my encounter with an ancient text so as to merge with the horizon of the document (Horizontverschmelzung) in a material agreement upon a common subject matter. In this way a new horizon is formed which embraces my horizon and that of the text, but goes beyond them, for such an understanding is creative of a new reality, and yet a new reality which itself is finite³² and open towards further movement into the future.

Hermeneutics here, of course, becomes a full ontology. The question concerning the possibility of understanding becomes--with Heidegger--the question

concerning the nature of reality, of being, for life has the character of gaining experience (Erfahrung), and all this happens in the medium of language. While the interpreter's own historically circumscribed vantage point is fully realized as such, and while no psychological or existential leap foreshortens historical distance, the past is shown, nevertheless, as continuously effective upon the³³ present in a manner consonant with observed life. While the dynamic of the ongoing mediation of the past to the present shows the Hegelian basis of Gadamer's philosophy, the finite and open character of this movement stands in contrast to the Hegelian, or any other, philosophy of history. These are gains indeed.

Nevertheless, old problems show themselves again. First, those which Jonas pointed up in Heidegger, seem to remain;³⁴ there emerges no clear criterion for value judgments, and no clear place for non-human nature. Second, the ontological freight placed upon language may be greater than it can carry. Does not language become again a metaphysical constant, like Hegel's Spirit or Heidegger's Being?³⁵ And if this is to be avoided--and Gadamer consciously wants to avoid it--must one not grant that reality exceeds the bounds of language? Gadamer remains a philosopher, and that in the very best sense. Theologians are just beginning to become enamored with his thought. As they continue to do so, Hans Jonas' instruction in the proper use of philosophy by the theologian should, wishfully, never be forgotten!

3. Eschatological Theologies of History: Pannenberg...Moltmann

The last point raised against Gadamer, i.e., his overburdening of language with ontology, is argued forcefully by Wolfhart Pannenberg, who sees the past mediated to the present within the course of historical movement--agreeing extensively here with Gadamer's analysis of Wirkungsgeschichte and Horizontverschmelzung--but conceives of this hermeneutical process as³⁶ standing within the wider context of universal history.

The distance between an ancient text, says Pannenberg, and its present interpreter demands that the new and comprehensive horizon which results in the course of interpretation must embrace a large segment

of the world in all its aspects, and it is inconceivable not to think of ever more comprehensive horizons as emerging from the task of understanding, until the widest horizon would embrace all of history, including its not yet realized future possibilities. He claims that Gadamer himself is hard-pressed not to move in this direction:

It is a peculiar spectacle to see how an incisive and penetrating author has his hands full trying to keep his thoughts from going in the direction they inherently want to go. Gadamer's book offers this kind of spectacle when he strives to avoid the Hegelian total mediation of the truth of the present by means of history.³⁷

Linguisticity is too narrow a thread to bridge the distance from past to present; such a mediation must

occur within the realm of the stated content itself as this becomes visible in its historicness, so that art, religion, law, and even such an apparently nonhistorical matter as mathematics, are to be understood as contents. . . .³⁸

Pannenberg himself, consequently, asserts the need of linking past and present within a concept of universal history:

Only the unity of the totality of tradition provides the horizon--this is what is to be concluded, beyond the points Gadamer has made--for an assessment of the results of applications made in working with the transmitted texts.³⁹

Now Pannenberg is equally concerned to preserve that "irreducible finitude of experience" and that "openness of the future" which Gadamer also is trying to preserve against the Hegelian attempt to grasp the whole. But these can be preserved, according to Pannenberg, if in the manner of biblical history, one thinks of the end and completion of history as that from which the process gets its meaning, and as being known in a provisional and anticipatory way. The eschatological nature of the message of Jesus, understandably not recognized by Hegel due to the state of biblical studies at his time, makes this possible and demands it.⁴⁰

Pannenberg's whole theological program moves

within a universal history frame of reference, within which the present can be understood only in retrospect from the ultimate goal. But since that ultimate goal is known in an anticipatory way only--through the biblical history culminating in Jesus Christ--i.e. in the form of promise towards the fulfillment of which the process of history is moving in anticipation, the understanding of the future is mediated to the present through the promises from the past, i.e. through the Wirkungsgeschichte of promise which provides the center for which world history is the horizon.⁴¹

That a universal history defined in this way has little resemblance to the history of a positivist historian is clear. It becomes a theology of history. Yet Pannenberg is anxious not to narrow his discussion into one about Heilsgeschichte, though the latter, especially as explicated for the Old Testament by Gerhard von Rad, provides both the impetus and much of the promise-fulfillment structure of his universal history. From a strongly christological orientation he wants to move out to embrace actually all of history, not only one strand of history (Heilsgeschichte) nor merely the inner history of faith (Bultmann), but history in its earthy and concrete features, though interpreted from the standpoint of its divine goal as anticipated in Christ.

A vast program indeed! The relation of particularity and universality--of Heilsgeschichte and Weltgeschichte--has here again been opened up with new enthusiasm and fresh perspectives, not the least of which is Gadamer's contribution, corrected towards a broader base for ontology than language can offer. If the New Hermeneutic of Fuchs and Ebeling employed linguisticality as a new means to collapse the distance between past and present--in line with our "air route" tradition in hermeneutics, Pannenberg presents a "ground route" again. But by such re-application of these metaphorical categories we do not want to minimize the advances that have been made.

Jürgen Moltmann's Theology of Hope shares with Pannenberg the search for "an alternative to the modern, post-Kantian concept of science, to the critical concept of reason, and to the historicism of a critical historical treatment of reality."⁴² It shares, further, Pannenberg's understanding of history as a movement between promise and fulfillment. But

when this movement is, according to Pannenberg, in progress only because of the yet unfinished state of world history, so that it will stop when the universal goal of history is reached, Moltmann objects. This is, for him, a falling back into Greek cosmos-thinking, which sees the world as an ultimately static, self-contained entity, only that the "epiphany of the eternal present" lies still in the future.

Over against such an undue emphasis by Pannenberg on the end of history, and the resurrection as the anticipatory revelation that makes it available for contemplation already, Moltmann sees the crucial biblical claim in the fact that the Risen Lord is recognized as being identical with the Crucified One. This gives hope that the present world in its "crucified state," its godforsakenness, shares in the promise of the resurrection. But it gives this not only as insight, but also as mission.

The theologian is not concerned merely to supply a different interpretation of the world, of history and of human nature, but to transform them in expectation of a divine transformation.⁴³

The bridging of the gap between the Bible and the present is accomplished in the mission of the church, set off by the promise generated from the identity of the Crucified and the Risen Lord and infused as, not only contemplative, but also active hope into history.

The missionary direction is the only constant in history. For in the front-line of present mission new possibilities for history are grasped and inadequate realities in history left behind.⁴⁴

No doubt, Moltmann's critique points up Pannenberg's weakest, or better, least clarified area of thought, namely, his claim that universal history is God's revelation accessible in its totality proleptically in the historically verifiable resurrection of Jesus. Whether Moltmann advances significantly beyond Pannenberg, however, in his attempt to emphasize promise, mission, movement, openness of the future, etc. without resorting to such universal constants as cosmos, being, universal goal of history, etc., is doubtful. Does not his own terminology beg the question precisely on these points? Can one think of promise and fulfillment

without positing an ultimate fulfillment or of mission without a "mission accomplished"? Here we seem to stand at a human limit which apparently can be recognized, as Moltmann ably does, but not transcended.

Conclusion

So the discussion goes on, with also many names and publications that I have not mentioned, and with openness towards the future. But essays must end. Any rounding off can only take the form of a completely personal assessment of one's own preferences. Mine will have emerged, no doubt, in the course of the essay. On a long-range view across the ages, I prefer the "ground route" tradition to the "air route" tradition, without denying to the latter fruitful insights. In the present situation I see the "ground route" traditions as showing their most fruitful points in a philosophy that takes seriously Hegel's mediation of past and present through an historical process which embraces both the sacred and the secular and seeks to see them in their interrelation. But it must be a philosophy more reserved than Hegel's in its assessment of speculative possibility; it must forego the attempt to reach the peak of the Hegelian pyramid and be satisfied to remain on his penultimate level, the level where man confronts God as a transcendent God, a transcendence that cannot be grasped even philosophically, as Heidegger tried. I see much promise in this direction in the philosophy of Gadamer, but more so in his continuity with Hegel than in his continuity with Heidegger.

In theology--which must remain distinct from philosophy and not be collapsed with it or subsumed under it, as wants to happen in the case of the relationship both of Bultmann and the New Hermeneutic to Heidegger--the mediation of the past to the present, of the Bible to modern men and women, the "ground route" of the Heilsgeschichte tradition, from von Hofmann to von Rad, is the most adequate hermeneutic, in my judgment. Yet I realize the need for a more adequate relationship between Heilsgeschichte and Weltgeschichte, a problem to which Pannenberg and Moltmann have addressed themselves helpfully by resorting to the biblical dynamic of promise and fulfillment, understood not

only as operative between the Old and the New Covenant, but also between the whole biblical and church historical past and the eschatological future.

But this reach for the totality needs to remain humble; Emil Fackenheim's concluding paragraph to his book The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought expresses this for philosophy in a way that covers theology as well:

. . . philosophic thought must. . . grope for what may be called a fragmented middle. This is not to suggest a revival of the Hegelian philosophy. But it is to suggest that philosophic thought, however rooted in existential commitments, craves a comprehensiveness which transcends them. To be sure, this craving can no longer expect, or even seek, more than fragmentary satisfaction. Yet it is not doomed to total frustration, and it is unvanquishable. Currently, the metaphysical urge is widely mocked, denied and obscured by a flight into piecemeal philosophizing. But, as Kant wrote, "that the spirit of man should ever wholly abandon metaphysical investigations is as little to be expected as that men, in order not always to breathe impure air, should ever prefer not to breathe at all."⁴⁵

NOTES

1. A comprehensive and well organized survey of literature on the subject of hermeneutics is offered in Norbert Henrichs' Bibliographie der Hermeneutik und ihrer Anwendungsbereiche seit Schleiermacher (Düsseldorf: Philosophia Verlag, 1968). Etymology and history of the concept hermeneutic(s) are presented by Gerhard Ebeling in his article "Hermeneutik" RGG, third edition, III (1959), 243-262. The more recent theological developments are sketched by James M. Robinson in "Hermeneutic Since Barth" The New Hermeneutic, edited by James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr.; New Frontiers in Theology II (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 1-77; and in Carl E. Braaten, History and Hermeneutics; New Directions in Theology Today II (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966). The "New Hermeneutic" and its background are introduced by Paul J. Achtemeier, An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969). The development of philosophical hermeneutics, with reference to Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer, is presented by Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics (Northwestern University Press, 1969).

2. Our concern is the manner of coping with historical distance, not the assumption of such distance; the latter forms the basic, explicitly or implicitly held presupposition which leads to the hermeneutic endeavor.

3. As our study moves through history with a view always towards elucidating the more recent developments, no more than passing and very general treatment can be given to selected trends and movements before Schleiermacher. To characterize Rabbinic interpretation as a system of prescriptions for every situation of life is obviously a simplification. A fuller discussion would need to point out that Rabbinic Judaism at its best is an ongoing dialogue between the Bible and later times. Valid cautions against popular caricatures of it have been given by two eminent authorities: Hermann L. Strack, Introduction to Talmud and Midrash (Meridian Books and Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959; first German edition 1887), pp. 87-98; and W. D. Davies, Introduction to Pharisaism; Facet Books, Biblical Series 16 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

4. See Richard R. Niebuhr, Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), pp. 72-134; and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode (2. Auflage, durch einen Nachtrag erweitert; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1965), pp. 162-185.

5. Ibid., pp. 205-228.

6. The bridging of historical and cultural distance is perhaps the central concern throughout Bultmann's life work. Specific reference should be made here to his essay "The Problem of Hermeneutics" Essays Philosophical and Theological (London: SCM Press, n.d.), pp. 234-261. First published in ZTK 47(1950) 47-69.

7. Quoted by Achtemeier, p. 21.

8. J. M. Robinson, p. 65, n 191, quotes the following statement from Church Dogmatics, I, 1, translated by G. T. Thomson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 3: "Church history so-called answers, from the point of view of Christian language about God, to no questions that need to put independently, and is therefore not to be regarded as an independent theological discipline. It is the indispensable auxiliary science to exegetical, dogmatic, and practical theology."

9. Ebeling, RGG³, III, 256.

10. J. M. Robinson, p. 22f.

11. Wahrheit und Methode, p. 492.

12. Sein und Zeit, paragraph 32. Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode, pp. 250-256.

13. In this section we are introducing certain philosophies of history, which represents a departure from the theme of hermeneutics understood as the endeavor to understand biblical texts. This departure seems necessary, however, in the case of Lessing and Herder, because their views of history were largely the result of their attempts to bridge the gap between the intellectual climate of their attempts to bridge the gap between the intellectual climate of their time and a past which, though experienced to some extent as a liability, could not be disowned, largely because of its religious significance. Conversely, their philosophies of history exerted major impacts on Scripture interpretation. While these statements pertain to Hegel also, in part, our reference to him here is prompted mainly by the fact that the most recent developments in hermeneutics are in many ways indebted to his thought, as we shall see when we consider Gadamer, Pannenberg, and Moltmann. By introducing wider philosophical and historical considerations here than Lessing, Herder, Hegel, and their times would have understood as hermeneutics, we are also foreshadowing the broadening and ever more widely comprehensive scope which hermeneutics has acquired through the last century and a half.

14. See also Hans-Joachim Kraus, "Das Geschichtsverständnis Lessings und Herders" Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins Neukirchen, 1956), pp. 111-116.

15. Ibid.

16. Particularly pertinent to our discussion is Emil L. Fackenheim, The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1967).

17. Wahrheit und Methode, p. 328.

18. Ibid., pp. 326ff.

19. Von Hofmann's main works in this connection are Weissagung und Erfüllung (1841-44); Der Schriftbeweis (1852-56); and above all, the post-humously published Biblische Hermeneutik, edited by W. Volck (Nördlingen: Verlag der C. H. Beck'schen Buchhandlung, 1880). See also Kraus, "Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann," pp. 207-210; and Otto W. Heick, "Erlangen Theology" A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), II, 203-216.

20. Von Hofmann, Biblische Hermeneutik, p. 2. (Writer's translation).

21. Ibid., p. 35.

22. Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time (revised edition; London: SCM Press, 1965), p. 21.

23. See Achtemeier, "Heidegger-II," pp. 41-54; and James M. Robinson, "The German Discussion of the Later Heidegger" The Later Heidegger and Theology; New Frontiers in Theology I, edited by James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 3-76, and the other essays in that volume. A glimpse into the inner circle of German theologians and philosophers around Heidegger and Bultmann is afforded by one of the major participants, Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Martin Heidegger und die Marburger Theologie" Zeit und Geschichte, edited by Erich Dinkler; Bultmann-Festschrift (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1964), pp. 479-490. For a devastating critique of the appropriation of Heideggerian thought, both "earlier" and "later", for theology, see Hans Jonas, "Heidegger and Theology" The Phenomenon of Life (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 235-261.

24. J. M. Robinson, p. 65. A summary of Ebeling's position, as well as that of Ernst Fuchs, is given by Robert W. Funk, "Language as Event: Fuchs and Ebeling" Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 47-71. Also easily accessible to English

readers is Gerhard Ebeling God and Word (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967); and the essays by Fuchs and Ebeling in J. M. Robinson, The New Hermeneutic together with a discussion by American theologians.

25. Fuchs' basic work is his Hermeneutik (1954), followed by several further volumes on the subject. For a discussion in English, see the works cited in notes 1 and 23 above.

26. Ernst Fuchs, "Das hermeneutische Problem" Zeit und Geschichte, pp. 360.

27. Jonas, "Heidegger and Theology," pp. 235-261.

28. See above, note 4. The second edition contains also the significant appendix "Hermeneutik und Historismus," pp. 477-512.

29. Ibid., p. 326.

30. Ibid., p. 327.

31. Ibid., p. 329-344.

32. Ibid., p. 284-290; 361ff.

33. Ibid., p. 361ff.

34. Gadamer seems to accept, in part, the criticism that his hermeneutic lacks a critical principle by which it would become possible not only to accept and acknowledge one's dependence on prior tradition, but could also judge, modify, or reject such tradition. He claims for his hermeneutic the truth of a corrective in a time where the optimistic belief in the possibility of shaping the future tends to lose sight of the frame of reference provided inescapably by the past, from within which alone the future can be appropriated (ibid., XXIIIff.).

35. A similar criticism seems to be intended by Herbert Braun, "Zum Verhältnis von Hermeneutik und Ontologie" Hermeneutik und Dialektik (Gadamer-Festschrift; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1970), 216-218.

36. The main lines of Pannenberg's theology are stated programmatically in Offenbarung als Geschichte, Kerygma und Dogma 1, edited by Wolfhart Pannenberg (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961). Of particular importance for our study is the essay "Hermeneutic and Universal History" Basic Questions in Theology; Collected Essays I (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 96-136.

37. Pannenberg, "Hermeneutic and Universal History," p. 129.

38. Ibid., p. 130. The flaw in Gadamer's argumentation, according to Pannenberg, is his devaluation of the predicative structure of language. According to Gadamer, the language of understanding is a language event; it does not express a reality outside of itself. This event is not detachable from its context, including that in its context which remains unsaid. This language event cannot, therefore, be "repeated" elsewhere; its re-saying would become a new event; language is not transferable (Wahrheit und Methode, p. 444, and Excursus VI). Gadamer argues this in the interest of the openness of the future, and polemically against the formulation of the concept of a philosophy of history. Pannenberg asserts against this that Gadamer himself has to resort to "objectivizing" statements when recreating in words the context of a text from the past.

39. Pannenberg, "Hermeneutic and Universal History," pp. 133f.

40. Ibid., p. 135.

41. Cf. Helmut G. Harder and W. Taylor Stevenson, "The Continuity of History and Faith in the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Toward an Erotics of History," JR 51(1971), 34-56, especially pp. 44-51.

42. Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 76.

43. Ibid., p. 84.

44. Ibid., p. 284.

45. Fackenheim, pp. 241f.

THE JOURNEY TO EMMAUS--AND TO FAITH: AN ILLUSTRATION OF HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

George R. Brunk III

The primary purpose of this essay is to demonstrate the exposition of historical-critical methodology as it is used in biblical interpretation. Experience has shown that generalization in the complex material of biblical texts tends to generate problems and confusion along with the attempted solutions. Specificity is an aid to communication and to evaluation. Rather than develop a descriptive summary of what the method seeks to do, this study will illustrate how it works by means of a specific case study. Furthermore, the choice of the Emmaus account for the study has the added benefit of contributing by its own subject matter to the question of biblical understanding and use by the believing community.¹

As a result of the particular purpose of this paper the following characteristics should be taken into account:

1. The approach will be more descriptive than normative. This is not an attempt to show how historical-critical exegesis should be done, but ways in which it is being done. Evaluative remarks may be introduced where deemed appropriate.

2. The style will be methodological rather than confessional and apologetical. Since the text being studied is a resurrection narrative, the Christian interpreter feels spontaneously drawn into the latter issues because of the centrality of the fact for faith. We are not obligated to pursue these dimensions here.

3. The result will be open-ended more than definitive. The intention is to create an experimental model for exploration of issues and the discovery of options. Vulnerability will not be evaded.

Orientation in Methodology

Due to the variable in definition of history and historiography, historical criticism has had no fixed definition. Ulrich Wilckens has described its use in

biblical interpretation as

that investigation of the biblical texts that, with a methodologically consistent use of historical understanding in the present state of its art, seeks via reconstruction to recognize and describe the meaning these texts have had in the context of the tradition history of early Christianity.²

Here the changing meaning of historical understanding is taken into account.

In a broad sense, "historical" points to that which is seen truly and correctly in its place in time and space. The historian reconstructs the facts of the past in narrative form with the goal of right understanding. In so doing he weighs the veracity of his sources in order that these sources may determine the outcome of the reconstruction. In biblical interpretation this is known as the literal sense, i.e., the meaning as originally intended in the historical context and conveyed in normal language of the time (historico-grammatical exegesis).³

The aspect of "critical" which is involved in the methodology points to the function of the human mind, exercising intelligent judgments and discerning appreciation in the interrogation and evaluation of the sources. Both aspects, the historical and the critical, raise complex issues for theology. These matters will not be taken up systematically in this paper.

Just as no final definition of historical-critical method is available, so also there has existed no consensus on the specific methodological procedures. With respect to the synoptic Gospels, from which our text is taken, Joachim Rohde can observe: "The history of the study of the synoptic gospels is . . . the history of the changing methods used in the endeavor to obtain fresh knowledge."⁴ The methods of research have completed something of a full circle: from the critical reconstruction of the narrative text (textual criticism or lower criticism), through the critical assessment of the integrity of the documents (source criticism and literary criticism) and the attempted restoration of the real history behind the sources (historical criticism in the narrow sense) with then the aid of preliterate genre study (form criticism), to the renewed appreciation of authorial purpose and

interests (redaction criticism) and finally to the analysis of the literary units, large and small, from the viewpoint of universal structures of human thinking apart from historical milieu (structural analysis) or within the historical context (architectural or genre criticism). This is the picture of movement from direct contact with the narrative as such to interest in what lies behind the narrative (original documents, historical facts, primitive beliefs or theology, acts of God in history) to renewed attention to the narrative in its own right.⁵ In a general way, the use of the Bible in the life of the church has benefitted by the return to canonical narrative as the locus of primary interpretative work. This restores the narrative to the general reader and student, and narrows the gap between the church's view of Scripture as authoritative revelation and the scientific forms of historical-critical study. However, in spite of the structuralist's escape from history (presaged by existentialist hermeneutics which retreated from history into historicity or by von Rad's contrasting of history and confessional history), the rootage of Christian faith in historical event and incarnational theology means that the questions of history intrude into biblical⁵ interpretation and must continue to be given attention.

Consequently, the work of historical-critical interpretation must be open to a wide variety of specific methodologies due both to the varied nature of the biblical material and to the wholeness of truth that is served by the widest range of data. The history of interpretation illustrates the dangerous results of narrow pursuit of one method through which too many problems are⁷ forced to pass at the cost of "forced conclusions." Method can be tyrannical when exclusive and totalitarian.

A degree of standardization for critical procedure has developed from which, at least, additions and corrections take their departure. It is represented by the formula adopted for the Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament: Text, Form, Ort, Wort, Ziel (text, literary form, historical situation, meaning of words and sentences, theological purposes or kerygmatic intention). George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Theological Seminary advocates a similar approach and defends its compatibility with evangelicalism when the presuppositions of faith are

as respectable as the presuppositions of non-faith.⁹ This study will follow this five-phase method, except Form will come fourth, in order to illustrate and provide a basis for discussing and evaluating the method (see Miller's essay to follow).

I. Text: Text Critical Problems

The pericope of the Emmaus Appearance contains few major textual problems. This is due, in all probability, to the fact that it is without parallel in the older gospels (no harmonization tendencies) and it is basically in narrative style with implicit theological meaning (no theological tendencies). The manuscripts show a wealth of stylistic improvements of no consequence to the meaning,¹⁰ but of interest to the study of sources where one must distinguish redaction and tradition. Another type of textual variant is motivated by attempted historical improvement.

The Emmaus narrative exemplifies a rather important variant of this type (v.13). Some manuscripts read 60 stadia, others read 160. The text tradition has likely been influenced by the historical problem of the location of Emmaus. Thus the problems of textual criticism and historical criticism overlap. However, care must be taken to give proper weight to the various types of evidence. The temptation is strong to fix one side of the evidence and then to make other data conform to it. This is a temptation both for scientific work and for theological interpretation, especially where a high view of Scripture might appear to be served by harmonization.

A brief statement on the historical problem of the village of Emmaus will be given later. Here one must weigh the textual evidence on its own. External evidence (manuscript variant readings) is decidedly stronger for 60 stadia. Internal evidence (dynamics which explain variation) is more complex. Have scribes changed 160 to 60 (deletion of one Greek word) in order that the round trip journey in one day be more reasonable? Or conversely, did the knowledge of the important village of Emmaus (Nicopolis) at the edge of the Shephelah plain cause a scribe to add the word for one hundred in order to harmonize with that location? On balance, the rule of preferences for the more difficult reading would point to 60, since the patristic evidence prefers the more distant Nicopolis

site and shows no problem with the longer journey for the two disciples late in the day. The persistence of 60 in the greater number of manuscripts (as well as the better ones) in spite of the patristic preference of Nicopolis is evidence for its originality in the known text.

An example of how textual criticism can contribute to the history of interpretation is found in the codex D reading of oulammaous instead of Emmaous (Emmaus) in verse 13. This appears to be a reading taken from Genesis 28:19 (LXX) and suggests that a scribe is seeing Bethel as the location and probably connecting the account of Jacob's dream with the Emmaus appearance in a Christological interpretation of the O.T. (cf. Gen. 28:16): "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it;" note the nonrecognition of Christ in Luke 24

The omitting or including of verse 12--"But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen clothes by themselves; and he went home wondering at what had happened" (RSV omits the verse)--is an important decision connected to the Emmaus text (vv.13-27) by common subject matter. Among text critics this is known as an example of Westcott's and Hort's Western non-interpolations, i.e., the Western manuscripts did not add the reading where the generally more reliable Alexandrian (Neutral) manuscripts did. Verse 12 is then seen as a borrowing from John 20:3-10 to explain and harmonize--poorly, in critical judgment--with the group visit to the empty tomb of v. 24 and Peter's seeing the Lord, v. 34. But this evidence can be turned around to argue that this "poor" integration of these three tomb visits/appearances was the cause of the Western deletion. With respect to the external evidence, the present tendency is to accept as genuine these longer readings, the so-called Western non-interpolations, since the more recently published second century p75 papyrus contains them (so Aland, Metzger). Moreover, it is possible to explain v. 12 as an example of Luke's affinity to the Johannine tradition (oral or written) and his literary device of using flash-backs from the Emmaus story to the empty tomb section (vv.1-12). Finally, it is easier to explain the apparent discrepancies between v. 12 and the larger context by Luke's concession to redactional interests than by a scribe's harmonizing interests since the latter fails to bring the second disciple

from John 20 in order to harmonize with the plural ("some") of v. 14.¹¹

II. Ort: Historical Situation and Its Problems

Having established the correct text, or better, the text as near to that of the original as our manuscripts permit, we move into the content itself. Sometimes this has been seen as a qualitative leap as in the older distinction between lower and higher criticism--one could critically evaluate the historical vicissitudes of the sacred text after it was written in order to return to the pure text, but to probe into the inspired text with the tools of rational investigation was irreverent and inappropriate. Many conservative believers still make this the line of demarcation; a marginal few reject even textual criticism (the Authorized Version is infallible, etc.). Today the more debated issue is whether the use of the critical method to recover meaning in the text includes also a critical evaluation of the expressed meaning--does Paul here say what is consistent with his best theological insight (Sachkritik, or content criticism)? Does Luke destroy the original meaning of salvation by historicizing it? Is there early Catholicism already in the canonical writings.¹²

The various methods for interrogating the text do not follow a rigorously logical order because of their interaction and overlapping. The order is best determined by the nature of the material in a given passage. We begin by taking note of several historical problems raised by the Emmaus account. Critical commentaries of another generation gave large place to such matters, even at the expense of theological explanations, and little new evidence has been gained toward the resolution of the problems in more recent research.

The distance of 60 stadia corresponds to no location of a village named Emmaus attested in biblical times. Josephus speaks of an Emmaus, 30 stadia from Jerusalem, known as Qualoniyeh or Colonia in Latin. The only other Judean site named Emmaus in sources from the period is Amwas or Nicopolis about 160 stadia from Jerusalem at the eastern edge of the hill country. During the patristic period this was the place identified with Luke 24:13, and this would explain the tendency "to correct" 60 stadia to 160.

Since the Middle Ages, another site, exactly 60 stadia from Jerusalem and known as El-Qubeibeh, has attracted attention. During the Crusades the name Castellum Emmaus appears in connection with the site, but no evidence is available to confirm the designation as being prior to the Crusaders who sought out the holy places, sometimes disregarding local tradition (Amwas in our case) in preference for convenience and/or biblical data (60 stadia of Luke 24:14). Consequently, the more probably historical solution (Amwas) must stand in tension with the best manuscript reading (60 stadia). The location of Emmaus cannot be solved with finality.

The identification of Cleopas and his companion is of considerably greater interest for understanding the Emmaus appearance narrative. The possible explanation, however, is as uncertain as it is fascinating. Cleopas is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, but he may be identified with the Clopas of John 19:25, the brother of Joseph and uncle of Jesus, according to Hegesippus.¹³ Cleopas would be the Greek form of the Semitic Clopas. Cleopas was the father of Simon (Simeon), the leader of the Jerusalem church after James (see Hegesippus). If this identification were correct, then the significance of the Emmaus appearance would be illuminated. Several additional lines of projection suggest themselves. Might the appearance of Cleopas be included in the 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 list under the category of "To all the apostles," v. 7?¹⁴ It is clear from the New Testament material that a recipient of an appearance tended to play a significant role in the life of the church. In fact, an additional question is raised as to whether the unnamed companion of Cleopas was not his son, Simeon, who was chosen to succeed James precisely because of his sharing in an appearance experience. Unfortunately, Eusebius does not mention any connection with Luke 24 nor give as reason for Simeon's election his having seen the Lord. Yet it is of interest that James, the Lord's brother, has received an appearance (1 Cor. 15:7) and this certainly explains, along with his kinship to Jesus, his prominence in the church. If this reconstruction is true, in part or in whole, we could conclude that the Emmaus appearance began as a legitimation formula and belongs to a group of appearances to relatives of Jesus (cf. Acts 1:14).¹⁵

A major area of historical inquiry centers around the place and time of the resurrection appearances in relation to their sequence. The general problem has to do with the Galilean versus Jerusalem setting. Matthew and Mark, indirectly, place Jesus' appearances to the disciples in Galilee. Luke and John portray Jerusalem as the area (except for Jn. 21). Matthew has an appearance to the women at the empty tomb (Jerusalem) but Luke recounts none; he implies, in fact, that there was none at the tomb. In the Emmaus narrative the appearance takes place on the day of the resurrection (v.13) and was preceded on that day by the appearance to Peter (v.34)! Mark is explicit that Galilee is the place for the first appearance (16:7). Much help is found for these differences by recognizing the theological significance of the time frame in Luke 24 and John 20. Luke seems to depict an ideal "day" of salvation history, a time of unified, unique revelation, because all of the appearances came on one day, by implication, but in Acts 1 he speaks expressly of forty days. John appears to underscore the connection of the Lord's presence in the appearances and the day of worship--Sunday (20:1, 19, 26). Luke may also be interested in the "first day of the week" motif. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that Luke is interested in a schematic interpretation of history which makes Jerusalem the hinge between the Galilean ministry and the mission of the church from Jerusalem to the end of the earth (symbolized by Paul in Rome). The center of the story takes place in Jerusalem where Jesus is crucified and is raised. As a result of these features the way is open to posit a longer length of time in Jerusalem in Luke 24--and thus possibly relocate the appearance to the twelve in Galilee. These comments are not meant to defend the Galilee setting as primary, but simply to illustrate the openness of the narratives to revision for whoever feels pressed to make an historical harmonization of the appearances.¹⁶

With this qualification on the historical precision of the narrative, we note also the evidence for the historical realism of the account. The following features are illustrative: (1) the disciples have no preconditioning to expect a resurrection and are still in the state of trauma and sorrow; (2) the "Christology" which they confess is minimalist, for Jesus was a prophet and the bearer of nationalistic hope; (3) the disciples identify with

the Jewish people--"our chief priests and rulers." It is also widely accepted that the place name Emmaus, the indication of distance, and the specific name of Cleopas can only be explained by the rootage of the basic Emmaus event in historical memory. The extent to which this historical character covers the entire narrative is a problem spoken to by literary critical and form critical investigation.

III. Wort: Philological Analysis (Linguistic Criticism)

The analysis of the specific text of a document so that the language becomes transparent, disclosing the meaning of the author, is a microscopic and important part of interpretation. The central focus is on the lexical, grammatical, and stylistical characteristics of the text. It is a highly significant aspect in the case where the document is in a foreign language and from an ancient period of history.

This exegetical procedure has been well known and widely practiced, especially since the Reformation's emphasis on the literal sense of the Scripture demanded historico-grammatical study. Space prohibits more than several illustrations of this level of interpretation in the Emmaus account.¹⁷ We choose an example from each of the two main moments of the account: the interpretation of Scripture "in the way," and the revelation at the meal. Verse 27 has been the center of speculative attention regarding the exact references to the Messiah in all of Scripture. Examination of the language as Luke uses it suggests a quite different perspective. In parallel to Acts 8:35 ("and beginning with this Scripture, he told him the good news of Jesus") the statement points to a movement not from reference to reference in the Old Testament but from Old Testament promise to fulfillment in "the things concerning himself." The sense would be: "Taking as starting points passages from both Moses and all the prophets. . . ."

Furthermore, the use of the word all in Luke and in this verse cannot be pressed too literally in a quantitative sense. Rather the usage is certainly related to Luke's emphasis on the unity and continuity of salvation history, i.e., the Old Testament in its entirety can be used to explain the meaning of what has happened to Jesus. In fact, this is strengthened by the phrase "beginning with Moses and all the

prophets," in which we see the arch of redemptive purpose from the beginning to its end in Jesus' death-resurrection. Luke invites us not primarily to look for specific passages but to see the sweep of divine purpose (cf. the words, "it was necessary," in v. 26, which reflect the same interests).

Nor should one miss the unusual fact that the object of interpretation is not Scripture (although v. 32 and v. 45 use the word to specify the object); the object is "the things concerning himself." Here, it is not the Scripture which needs explanation but the enigmatic events of Jesus, the hoped-for Messiah. Even when in vv. 32 and 45 the expression is "opening the Scripture" or "opening the mind to understand the Scripture," it is the enigma of Jesus' death that needs explanation. The Scriptures were not explained per se but only inasmuch as they are able to clarify the fulfilled will of God in Jesus. This is reflected in the Christological use of Scripture by the early church. The central event was the act of God in Jesus; the right understanding of the event was determined in the light of the revealed purpose as discovered by correctly understanding the Scripture. Along this line, one can suggest that the third inflection "in all the Scriptures" (locative), might be translated better as, "by all the Scriptures" (instrumental).

The description of the meal, during which the recognition of the guest takes place, raises the question of whether a normal meal or the Lord's Supper is signified. A comparative study of the language shows a striking parallel with that of the feeding miracles in Luke and the agape meals of the early church in Acts (cf. especially the "breaking of bread" of v. 35 with Acts 2:42,46; 20:7,11). It appears certain, therefore, that on the redactional level Luke is linking the meal experience at the various stages of his historical period. The lesser similarity with Luke's Last Supper narrative is due apparently not to a distinction from the other meal scenes but to his use of a different tradition, which Luke has not conformed to the Lord's Supper language. The objection, that the two disciples at Emmaus had not been in the Upper Room, certainly means that they did not see in this meal the full meaning of the Last Supper, but it hardly answers the question of whether the church and Luke saw in this meal a point of contact with Christ's being-among-us at the early

church's fellowship meals which carried on the Last Supper tradition.¹⁸ That the traditional language of these meals has influenced the Gospel narrative of Luke, as noted above, points in this direction.¹⁹

Although nineteenth century biblical studies tended to treat literary criticism as source criticism (date, authorship, origin, and integrity of the documents--unified or composite), more recently trends regard "source criticism" as the proper description of this narrower interest; the term "literary criticism" then is used in the classical sense as "the study and evaluation of literature as artistic production."²⁰

A primary element in source criticism is the analysis of word usage. Language is an indicator of the author's style and serves to detect the unified or composite nature of the narrative. It may seem an act of irreverence to inquire into the literary unity of the Emmaus account since its artistic unity is conspicuous; yet recent critical study has often insisted on dividing the story into two strata. This separation results in an account of the trip to Emmaus and the meal (vv.13,15b,16,28-31) as one strata, and the conversational element as a second strata (vv.15a,²¹ 17-27) which is considered to be Lucan redaction. In point of fact, the conversation is related to Lucan concerns both in the references back to 24:1-12²² and in the development of a strong theological motif in Luke-Acts, the role of Scripture in Christian faith. However, a detailed analysis of the language does not confirm this division. The distribution of Lucanisms and non-Lucanisms does not correspond to the literary dissection. It follows that Luke has used a source or sources which have been so carefully reworked that no literary tool can separate redaction from tradition or one traditional source from another.²³ This editorial procedure is recognized as characteristic of Luke.

If the Emmaus story has been expanded by later additions, this will have to be determined not by conventional source criticism but by form and tradition criticism (see below). An exception here is probably to be made for v. 34. The confessional statement of resurrection faith based on the appearance to Peter is apparently secondary in its present setting in the Emmaus narrative, for it breaks the flow of the narrative and can be explained as a way to retain the priority of Peter as witness to the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:5).

The broader interests of literary criticism can be illustrated by an analysis of the structural aspects of the narrative. In this regard our narrative is very sophisticated. The final verse indicates the two streams of the narrative's emphasis: "in the way" and "in the breaking of bread." Here also the unifying theme (Leitmotif) is alluded to in the word "known" which appeared previously in v. 16 and v. 31. These latter two contexts display a literary similarity (cf. the Greek) and stand at the head of each of the two parts of the narrative:

While they were	When he was at
talking and discussing	table with them
together (v.15)	(v.30)
Their eyes were kept	Their eyes were
from <u>recognizing</u>	opened and they
[<u>knowing</u>] him (v.16)	<u>recognized</u>
	[<u>knew</u>] him (v.31)

A part of this structure is the appearance of Jesus (15b) and his disappearance (31b). The appearance motif is placed in chiastic order to the recognition motif, as follows:

v.15	appearance	nonrecognition
v.31	recognition	disappearance

The entire account can be seen in chiastic form: departing from Jerusalem and returning there, with the center point (the low point where the tide turns) between vv. 24 and 25.

Such literary analysis could be greatly extended but this suffices to demonstrate the high form of art which the narrator successfully pursues. This is not art for art's sake, but art at the service of communicating spiritual truth at the existential level. In that respect, literary devices and style itself are not without theological relevance.

IV. Form: Form Criticism and Tradition History

Strictly speaking the form critical question does not apply to the canonical shape of our narrative. Form criticism is based on the typical forms of expression characteristic of oral tradition and the setting they have in popular, unselfconscious communication. As noted above, the Emmaus story is as highly developed artistically as any biblical passage. In the event that Luke had received the story directly from an eyewitness (Cleopas), no stage of oral tradition would exist (so Ellis). But the

literary analysis has shown the high probability that Luke used a traditional source whether in literary or oral form. Therefore one can speak of a form tradition stage behind the present account.

A definite feature of this form (genre or Gattung) is the recognition motif. The structural observations show that this is the mark of the Lucan shape of the account. In all probability it was the center of the account at all levels of the tradition. If any feature of the account is traceable to an historical bedrock, it is the appearance experience at Emmaus when Jesus is recognized as present with Cleopas and his companion. We have seen a possible historical place for such an appearance in the discussion on historical criticism. Luke's confidence in the historical rootage of the event receives some indirect support from his reliance on the early tradition of the appearance to Peter (v.34) and from the fact that Luke tends to narrow the time in which the official appearances were given and the persons to whom they were given (the forty-day resurrection period leaves Paul's appearance outside the normative period.)

The recognition form definitely excludes the comparison of the story with the wandering deity or unknown traveler type found in a variety of cultures. This had been the definition used in older form criticism (Gunkel, Bultmann), and, although Gunkel compared it with the accounts of theophany in Genesis, the usual conclusion was to place the setting of the Emmaus account in a Hellenistic milieu and, therefore, to see it as legendary and secondary. Unfortunately, the term legend has been undifferentiated by most exegetes who apply it to our account. Under the influence of Bultmann this has resulted in a definite bias against historical correspondence. The legendary feature is said to obscure the real, primitive picture of the rise of Easter faith.²⁴ It must be noted, however, that legend is a matter of literary form and is not an expression of historical value. [One can take note in passing that this is only one example of the tendency for one method to trespass beyond its proper realm]. In point of fact, the term may, with propriety, be used for the Emmaus account in the sense that the primary interest of the narrative is not historical documentation but edifying narration in which historical precision is of subservient interest.

This point is demonstrated by recognizing that the Emmaus narrative follows quite closely the anthropomorphic theophanies of the Old Testament and intertestamental literature (Gen. 18; Judg. 5,13; Tob. 5,12; Testament of Abraham).²⁵ Here the recognition motif is prominent because God presents himself as man or angel but must be understood as God. The divine being appears in a natural manner and disappears mysteriously. On the other hand, these stories use the recognition only as preparation for giving a message or assistance. In the resurrection narrative of this type (cf. Jn. 20:11-18; 21:1-14), the recognition is the main point, the climax of the theophany. The theophany has become resurrection-Christophany.

It follows that the use of this "medium of expression" for an Easter appearance can be placed better in the earliest Palestinian tradition than in a late Hellenistic context. At the same time one must recognize that, unlike the list of witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15 or Paul's testimony to the resurrection, the purpose is not apologetic, but paranetic. Even in new Testament times the confusion of human and divine forms was recognized (see Acts 12:12-17; Heb. 13:2). The recognition here used did not lend itself to "proof" but to "interpretation" of an event. The story is not designed to witness to the reality of the resurrection but to its significance.²⁶ Ellis notes, for example, that Genesis 19 and Tobit 12 indicate that eating (cf. Emmaus!) does not prove "materiality!"²⁷ The consequence of this situation is that the Emmaus event slips through the fingers of the historian qua historian but speaks to his understanding of the nature of resurrection faith. At the same time there is no reason to doubt the occurrence of an Emmaus appearance in essentially the manner described, but we can not demonstrate what the actual event was. The anthropomorphic theophany form finds its connection with the larger appearance tradition (and therefore its legitimacy) in the "appearance of a divine being" language and in the eschatological otherness of the resurrected One in the mysterious non-recognition and the transient presence of the divine being.

This history of tradition for the resurrection appearances supports the primitive nature of the meal motif which stands at the heart of the account. Less demonstrable is the journey motif and the

conversation. The longer sojourn of Jesus on earth and extended discourse is more typical of late stages in the tradition including the post-canonical writings. Recent studies have shown that the movement of the tradition is probably not simply either from spiritual to material representation or from material to spiritual but a mixture of both Palestinian realistic descriptions and Pauline-like spiritual statements which develop in different ways. Luke appears to use older realistic traditions.²⁸

The results of this stage of research are minimal with respect to historical certainty. We have good reason to suggest either an apostolic or "private" appearance at the base of our account. This, it would appear, suffices to root the account in history. On the other hand, the form of the narrative is a signal to the interpreter to look for its real intention elsewhere. This intention is what attracted Luke and what he developed in his unique way. Luke's literary method is to take old traditions, preserve their original intent, but press them into Lucan style and schemes (cf. the speeches in Acts and the same, old motifs in the conversational material of the Emmaus account).

V. Ziel: Redaction Criticism or Lucan Perspective

The mere observation that the Emmaus account is unique to Luke is clear indication that it holds a particular interest for him. In part this is an aesthetic interest as evidenced by the number of longer narratives which are typical and unique to Luke--Good Samaritan, Rich Man and Lazarus, Prodigal Son, etc. But just as clear is the theological intention served by the account. The process of discovering this intention is redaction (or composition) criticism.

Within chapter 24 one can detect several themes conspicuously elaborated by Luke.

1. The role of Scripture is significant. This is a major element in the Emmaus passage itself (vv.25-27; 32) and is taken up again in the appearance to the twelve (vv.44-47). The manner in which Scripture functions in the life of the community is highly developed. Scripture is seen as a necessary but not exclusive or even culminative factor in the formation of Christian faith (cf. v.27 with vv. 31,32). The Scripture is the key to determining the

legitimacy and meaning of contemporary events as a part of God's unfolding purpose (vv.26-27,44). So all of the essential characteristics of New Testament faith and practice--the saving work of Christ and the saving ministry of the church to the world--are rooted in the historical revelation of the divine purpose, Scripture (vv.46-47). Already the words of the historical Jesus are being drawn into the canonical circle (vv.6,44). Jesus' own word confirms the continuing authenticity and authority of the written word (vv.26,44) and his presence mediates its right understanding (vv.32,45).

2. The community atmosphere is very strong. The entire disciple band is already bonded together as a group of men and women (vv.9,13,22,33,36,50,53). The language of Christian assembly is present--"gathered together," "in the midst" (vv.33,36). It was observed that Luke certainly relates the meal experience at Emmaus with the breaking of bread celebration in the church (vv.30,35). The picture is already present just as one finds it in Acts 1:13,14 and following. The fact that two disciples participate in the Emmaus journey becomes important then for the Lucan scheme, for the two disciples represent the two or three in whose midst Jesus is present (Mt. 18:20). Although the theme is not explicitly developed, the picture is that of the "hermeneutical community" where the Scripture is interpreted along Christological lines and with Christological assistance. On the other side, the point is made that resurrection faith itself originates in relationship with the community and its life where Jesus is present.

3. The purpose of the Emmaus account is to show the dynamic by which faith in the resurrected Lord is acquired. The dynamic field contains the elements of Scripture and fellowship in the breaking of bread (not in a sacramental, eucharist fashion) with the catalyst of Christological presence. This demonstrates emphatically that Luke has not objectivized the gospel, for he has placed at the heart of his resurrection narrative the Emmaus account which communicates the existential dimension of faith, not an external, objective apologetic for the resurrection. Luke shows himself to be a pastoral theologian as well as a theologian of salvation-history (see below).

4. The presence of our narrative in the resurrection chapter preserves the mysterious aspect of the resurrection event as well as the historical aspect.. The typical Lucan balance and inclusiveness is shown by his setting side by side the Emmaus experience and the appearance to the disciples with its motif of material evidence (vv.39,42-43). In this way Luke avoids a one-sided view of the resurrection event as a crassly material and natural event (Jewish apocalyptic tendency) or as a spiritual event with no historical effect and open to docetic dissolution. He maintains this balance at the price of appearing exaggerated on each of the two points.

This investigation of Lucan insight could be amplified yet another step by placing Emmaus within the context of the entire literary corpus of Luke-Acts. The different elements mentioned above all have their counterparts in the earlier material (life of Jesus) and the later (life of the early church). One can call chapter 24 the bridge between the historical Jesus and the church. In contrast to Conzelmann we must see the division of these periods as secondary to the primary concern of demonstrating the continuity of saving history. The resurrection period is a special divine act--the probable meaning of the forty days--in which Jesus himself leads the church from the pre- to the post-resurrection situation (Acts 1:2,3). Jesus, for example, models the church's interpretation of Scripture. The problem of the contemporaneity of Jesus is solved in John's Gospel by dissolving the temporal distinction of time (without total loss of eschatology or historicity, however). Luke chooses to retain the temporal distinction by his two-volume work and then works out the issue of continuity by a bridging period in which the earthly fellowship is restored in a form of glorified epiphany, which in turn prepares for the presence of Christ in the Spirit and in his Name in the church. The table fellowship is a specific example of this trajectory.²⁹

Conclusion

The preceding material serves to illustrate the wide interests of historical-critical study. The range of issues posed by this approach to biblical interpretation has surfaced. The first question is simply whether our example has been pressed as far as is proper to historical investigation. We have

entered the area of theology in the redaction-critical section but merely as descriptive theology, not prescriptive. Neither have we pursued Sachkritik (content criticism), whose legitimacy is more questionable. Nor have we pursued the latest methodologies such as structuralist analysis, architectural criticism, genre criticism, et al. Certainly the range is inexhaustible.

Ultimately, for those who stand in the believing community the burning issue is whether the fruit of this study leads straight and meaningfully to proclamation. As Thielicke says of theology, so perhaps we can say of critical exegesis: "If it cannot be proclaimed, it is not legitimate."

NOTES

1. The use of the Emmaus narrative was favored more particularly because of the author's doctoral dissertation on the passage. "The Concept of the Resurrection according to the Emmaus Account in Luke's Gospel," ThD dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1975.

2. Translated and cited by Edgar Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method (Phila.: Fortress, 1975), p. 33.

3. Krentz (p. 39, n. 18) makes the interesting observation that historical criticism, while it has the reputation of destructiveness for the church, is "a most conservative process, since historical research conserves the textual data."

4. Joachim Rohde, Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists (Phila.: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 1.

5. See Hans Frei, The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative. Cf. B. S. Child's call for canonical criticism, i.e., accepting the canonical shape as the legitimate context for interpretation.

6. "Biblical Criticism, N.T." IDB, Supp. Vol., p. 102.

7. See W. G. Kümmel, The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972).

8. Krentz, p. 2. A similar list of steps was suggested by the Ecumenical Study Conference of Wadham College, Oxford (1949).

9. G. E. Ladd, New Testament and Criticism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967).

10. This stylistic freedom of the early scribes may be significant in the sense that it reveals a state of mind that does not understand authoritative, sound writing as letter-bound, mechanically determined.

11. See further in Brunk, p. 32ff.

12. G. Berkouwer, Holy Scripture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 355: "In all analysis of 'criticism,' a radical view of this kritikos of God's Word must be preserved, whereby a sharp distinction is made between criticism of the word and by the Word." As Berkouwer goes on to show, the relationship between the two must not be missed. Some feel that avoiding criticism of the Bible enhances the freedom of the Bible to criticize. The opposite is just as possible--without criticism one inevitably reads one's prejudices into the Bible with the result that the reading is no truer to Scripture than that of the reductionistic critic. The appearance of fidelity to the Scripture is there because of a confessed faith in Scripture as revelation and because the interpretation is per force consistent with a theological tradition.

13. Cited by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History. This would mean that John 19:25 says: his [Jesus'] mother's sister-in-law, Mary the wife of Cleopas. So E. Meyer, Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums, p. 74.

14. See Brunk, pp. 97-105 for the problems and the implications of this connection between 1 Cor. 15 and Emmaus.

15. Beda Rigaux, Dieu l'a ressuscité (Gembloux: Duculot, 1973) 225, note 4. A variant reading in v. 35 (λέγοντες for λέγοντας) would make the reference to Simon refer to the unnamed disciple with Cleopas. Although nongenuine, it seems to indicate an attempt to make Luke's account conform to the historical reconstruction suggested above. Perhaps someone has corrected the story on the basis of good information but contrary to Luke's intention. Origen may be responsible here as in the case of the 160 stadia in v. 13.

16. For the most recent suggestion of harmonization see George Eldon Ladd, I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 91. But he does not succeed fully and suggests the scheme with tongue in cheek.

17. See Brunk, pp. 141-334 for extensive work on this level.

18. Ladd, p. 97 and Klostermann, Das Lukasevangelium, p. 238 as well as others.

19. See Hermann Patsch, "Abendmahlsterminologie ausserhalb der Einsetzungsberichte," ZNW 62 (1971), 210-31; Brunk, pp. 279-94.

20. Krentz, p. 49.

21. Especially P. Schubert, "The Structure and Significance of Luke 24" in Neutestamentliche Studien für R. Bultmann (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1954), pp. 165-86 and H. D. Betz, "The Origin and Nature of Christian Faith according to the Emmaus Legend," Interp 23 (Jan 1969), 32-46.

22. It would be easy to attribute vv. 22-24 to Luke's hand because they appear to be a summary of Luke's empty tomb account.

23. Brunk, pp. 141-334 and also Rigaux, pp. 225-27.

24. See the documentation in John Alsup, The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel Tradition (Stuttgart: Calwer-Verlag, 1975), p. 216, notes 617, 618.

25. For exposition see ibid., pp. 239-65 and Brunk, "Resurrection," pp. 395-405. Both of these dissertations were done at the same time and reached similar, independent conclusions.

26. Rigaux, 231 and Brunk, 414f.

27. Gospel of Luke, 279.

28. See the dense but comprehensive discussion and bibliography in J. D. G. Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit (Phila.: Westminster, 1975), pp. 114-22.

29. Brunk, pp. 416-41. It must be stressed that the present exposition of Lucan theology is representative, not exhaustive.

CRITICISM AND ANALOGY IN HISTORICAL-CRITICAL INTERPRETATION

Marlin E. Miller

Two axioms of historical-critical methodology, though variously defined and implemented, nevertheless inform with some consistency historical-critical exegesis. I will limit this essay to those axioms: I will use George Brunk's "Journey to Emmaus: A Study in Critical Methodology" (ch. 14) in this volume as a point of reference to reflect critically upon the historical-critical method and to illustrate several of the axiological issues raised by this methodology. In addition to these formal and procedural limitations, I will further assume that historical-critical methodology is not simply a neutral technique of biblical interpretation, but that it is itself historically conditioned and carries with it certain philosophical and theological axioms, which may be, and in fact are, variously assessed as appropriate or apostate.

Historical-critical exegesis arose and gathered momentum in the seventeenth century as European Christendom's synthesis of Scripture, world view, and faith (dogmatically defined) was challenged by the scientific and philosophical reflections of the Enlightenment.¹ Doubtless the confessional and political conflicts of the preceding two centuries also riddled the credibility of Christendom's claim to an authoritative synthesis and nourished the scientific and philosophical reflection which gave birth to modern skepticism. If this is indeed the case, then ecclesiastical events as well as scientific and philosophical developments should receive some of the credit and/or blame for the birth and growth of historical-critical interpretation.

This assumption that historical-critical exegesis carries with it certain philosophical and theological axioms which are neither purely neutral nor strictly technical derives not only from a "guilt-(or praise-) by-association" reading of history, but appears to be a relatively widespread consensus among scholars

otherwise divided in confessional loyalties as well as in their assessment of the method.² Others who by implication may regard historical-critical inquiry as relatively neutral, would nevertheless set certain limits to the method (e.g. George Brunk's summary) or argue that it need not be associated with skeptical presuppositions.³ This, however, amounts to saying that it should be linked to certain presuppositions rather than defending its axiological neutrality.

EVALUATION OF "CRITICISM"

Two years before the close of the nineteenth century, Ernst Troeltsch articulated the foundational concepts of historical-critical interpretation in his essay "On Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology."⁴ According to Krentz, Troeltsch's statement still "haunts" theology. Krentz's ghostly imagery may be neither historically nor theologically appropriate. Nevertheless, the rigor with which Troeltsch challenged German Protestant theologians of his day to choose between the "historical" and the "dogmatic" methods in theology provides a significant point of reference and continues to shape the debate about assumptions of historical-critical interpretation by both its critics and its apologists (Maier, Harvey, et al.). And the "foundational concepts" of historical-critical interpretation as listed by Troeltsch, namely criticism, analogy, and correlation, also continue to inform the discussion on presuppositions--even though they may be variously defined and/or supplemented. In the following remarks, both these concepts and the polemically formulated alternatives between historical and dogmatic method will be taken into account.

According to Troeltsch, criticism as a foundational concept of historical-critical methodology conditions our whole attitude toward historical traditions. Rather than simply questioning particular facts and details of the past, it signifies a comprehensive stance toward all historical traditions, namely that the continuity and relevance of the traditions for the present depends upon critical and discriminating judgment. In contrast to the dogmatic method which ostensibly does not depend upon historical continuity and/or contingency, a critical stance can lead only to judgments of probability rather than statements of certainty. Such

judgments of probability, moreover, also establish higher and lower levels of probability by weighing the evidence and assessing it by the norms of critical reason. Contemporary critical reason rather than traditional authority becomes the arbiter of historical knowledge.

Troeltsch's observation that "criticism" implies judgments of probability rather than certainty seems to be confirmed by Brunk's description of the historical-critical method. Note, for example, the following statements of probability, as well as the different degrees of probability which these statements designate:

- "External evidence...is decidedly stronger for 60 stadia" (p.206).

- "If this reconstruction is true...we could conclude that the Emmaus appearance began as a legitimation formula...." (p.209).

- "Luke seems to depict an ideal 'day' of salvation history...." (p.210).

- "It is also widely accepted that the place name, the indication of distance...can only be explained by the rootage of the basic Emmaus event in historical memory" (p.211).

- "A definite feature of this form...is the recognition motif.... In all probability it was the center of the account at all levels of the tradition. If any feature of the account is traceable to a historical bedrock, it is the appearance experience of Emmaus when Jesus is recognized as present with Cleopas and his companion...." (p.215).

Brunk's description of the historical-critical method as used in the interpretation of the Emmaus story apparently confirms Troeltsch's observation that criticism issues in judgments of probability--even at those points where "historical bedrock" may be uncovered. Moreover these judgments of probability are themselves diverse: they may derive simply from weighing several textual readings against each other; they may reach tentative conclusions about the origin of the story based upon what seems to be the central intention; they may attempt to demonstrate the historical credibility of the events reported in the narrative. In any case, criticism as a stance cannot

and does not intend to claim the kind of certainty presupposed by the traditional dogmatic method of theology.

In common parlance, the notion of criticism therefore often carries pejorative connotations: to criticize means to pass judgment on, to condemn, to catalogue errors. When associated with biblical interpretation, such criticism ostensibly presupposes a skeptical attitude toward the biblical documents, toward their dependability, historical accuracy, veracity, and authority. Etymologically, however, "to criticize" also signifies: "to sift out, to divide from, to distinguish that which is specific to." Whatever else does not correspond to the specific and distinguishing characteristics of a particular document or other object of investigation and evaluation, can presumably be "sifted out." That which is sifted out may be judged erroneous or simply as something which is not a distinguishing characteristic of whatever is being "criticized." In this sense criticism seeks to make discriminating judgments by following normative criteria. This aspect of criticism, however, also carries with it a negative component: whatever does not correspond with the normative principles of investigation and assessment may then be discounted as uncertain, not meaningful, or unreal. Whatever does correspond to the criteria of discerning judgment may be accepted.

Within the limits of this summary, it is not possible to examine and evaluate all the specific criteria which may have been used in Brunk's paper (or in historical-critical exegesis in general). Such criteria do need continual reassessment. Nevertheless, criticism as an epistemological stance, as a way of knowing and appropriating past traditions, may in several respects itself be problematical. As a formal epistemological concept, criticism is often a kind of empty sack which is filled with whatever seems reasonably evident and clear to the contemporary critic. But if this formal understanding of criticism (which derives from Cartesian methodical doubt and Kantian critical philosophy) becomes its own criterion, judgments of historical probability may often be more a reflection of contemporary assumptions about reason and reality than of the historical object of perception and study. The critical question of criticism as a method, therefore, has to do with its

criteria and with the nature of probability expressed by critical judgment.

Particular judgments of probability may be an appropriate reflection of the object of investigation, namely the biblical narrative. Insofar as the biblical story refers to particular events and historical conditions, the probability of such critical judgments may well represent a more faithful interpretation of Scripture than the formulation of dogmatic statements which claim absolute certainty in the sense of exemption from the contingencies of time and space. If God has chosen to entrust divine revelation to the arbitrariness of historical events and existence and to particular people in particular times and places, such judgments of probability would not necessarily contradict the character of the biblical documents.

Some statements of probability may also simply reflect the degree to which an interpreter's questions and hypotheses do or do not correspond to the intention and the information of the text. In this case the factor of probability would in part be a commentary upon the interpreter's orientation and in part a recognition that the evidence available does not allow for a definite conclusion to the questions posed and the interpretive hypothesis being employed. It seems to me that Brunk's description largely demonstrates this orientation.

The notion of probability, however, may also reflect the introverted character of much, if not most, of modern criticism. According to Brunk's definition, the critical element "points to the function of the human mind, exercising intelligent judgments and discerning appreciation in the interrogation and evaluation of the sources" (p.204). This description apparently leaves open the question about the standard of intelligent judgment and discriminating appreciation. However, "criticism" as usually understood assumes that autonomous human reason functions as its own criterion for discriminating judgments.⁵ In this case granting an event or a report a higher or lower level of historical probability means ascertaining the degree to which it corresponds to what may be considered self-evident and clear to the modern interpreter.

According to Collingwood, the critical historian, rather than

relying on an authority other than himself, to whose statements his thought must conform...is his own authority and his thought [is] autonomous, self-authorizing, possessed of a criterion to which his so-called authorities must conform and by reference to which they are criticized.⁶

For Van Harvey this autonomy is not only a warning to be on guard against error, but "is grounded in the nature of historical knowledge itself." Consequently the critical historian

confers authority upon a witness. He reserves the right to judge who or what will be called an authority, and he makes this judgment only after he has subjected the so-called witness to a rigorous cross-examination.... If the historian permits his authorities to stand uncriticized, he abdicates his role as critical historian. He is no longer a seeker of knowledge but a mediator of past belief: not a thinker but a transmitter of tradition.⁸

If criticism thus signifies an epistemological procedure for conferring authority upon the biblical witnesses, we may need to choose between being transmitters of that particular tradition and critical historians. I would suggest, however, that functioning as transmitters of the biblical tradition calls for greater rather than less critical awareness, because it means subjecting the autonomy of modern reason to criticism as well as developing an empathetic understanding of the meaning of the biblical documents in their historical setting. The alternative need not then be a flight into dogmatic timelessness, as Troeltsch defined the alternative to historical criticism. It would rather go in the direction of making explicit the standards of criticism, examining the degree to which they correspond to the reality of the historical objects (in this case, the biblical documents), and allowing them to be judged by their appropriateness to that historical reality, rather than by the self-confirmation of autonomous reason (however that may be defined). Otherwise the formal epistemological category of modern criticism tends to create not only an historical difference but also a spiritual distance

between biblical revelation and contemporary understanding.

EVALUATION OF "ANALOGY"

Troeltsch's second fundamental concept of the historical method is analogy. Whereas the axiom of criticism tends to remain a more formal concept, analogy provides the historian with more concrete material in the exercise of discriminating judgment. Troeltsch described the principle of analogy as follows:

Analogy with what happens before our eyes and what is given within ourselves is the key to criticism. Illusions, displacements, myth formation, fraud, and party spirit, as we see them before our own eyes, are the means whereby we can recognize similar things in what the tradition hands down. Agreement with normal, ordinary, repeatedly attested modes of occurrence and conditions as we know them is the mark of probability for occurrences that the critic can either acknowledge really to have happened or leave to one side. The observation of analogies between past occurrences of the same sort makes it possible to ascribe probability to them and to interpret the one that is unknown from what is known of the other.⁹

Troeltsch goes on to speak of the "omnipotence of analogy" which in turn presupposes a "fundamental similarity" although not an "identity" between all historical events.

Troeltsch's understanding of analogy has not gone unchallenged.¹⁰ Some would criticize the methodological doubt which Troeltsch's principle of analogy seems to imply; others would challenge the "tyrannical" omnipotence of analogy; still others would find the anthropocentric orientation problematic. Some would also focus on whether the category of uniqueness, rather than a common kernel of similarity, has been given adequate focus by Troeltsch's definition of analogy. Regardless of the challenges raised to Troeltsch's understanding, analogy remains an axiom of historical-critical interpretation. But rather than reporting on that

debate in general, I would refer again to George Brunk's case study to examine one example of analogy as a means of historical interpretation. We may then return to the more systematic concerns with that example in mind.

Brunk employs the principle of analogy in several ways, particularly in the section on form criticism and tradition history (pp.214ff). The first point of analogy has to do with literary forms. Based on the "recognition" motif of the Emmaus story, Brunk finds greater similarity between the Emmaus narrative and several Old Testament theophanies than between Luke 24 and hellenistic legends of a wandering deity.¹¹ This literary analogy thus serves as a basis for the judgment that the Emmaus story reflects an early Jewish Christian rather than a later hellenistic setting (or, for that matter, an apocalyptic milieu). The underlying issue thus has to do with the appropriate categories for understanding the Emmaus occurrence. Brunk finds these categories in what we may designate as the "biblical world" rather than in either the apocalyptic or hellenistic categories of perception and thought. An historically appropriate understanding of what happened would therefore depend upon our beginning with the analogy between the Old Testament theophanies and the New Testament christophanies.

The question of analogy arises not only with respect to the most appropriate categories of understanding, but also in relation to the objective referent of these categories. What kind of occurrence lies behind the Emmaus narrative? Can it be reconstructed by the tools of historical reason (in part or entirely), or does it lie completely outside the field of historical analogy? Brunk's response to this question is two-fold: based on the categories of understanding provided by the narrative

the consequence of this situation is that the Emmaus event slips through the fingers of the historian qua historian but speaks to his understanding of the nature of resurrection faith. At the same time there is no reason to doubt the occurrence of an Emmaus appearance in essentially the manner described, but we cannot demonstrate what the actual event was.¹²

This conclusion derives however not only from an appreciation of the literary form, but also assumes

the unique character of Jesus' resurrected existence, which on the one hand belongs to a new order of corporeal existence not determined by time and space,¹³ and on the other hand breaks into the old order¹⁴ in a more than purely internal and subjective way. Thus, the resurrection event has both a mysterious and an historical aspect.

The third major, albeit somewhat more implicit analogy, which Brunk's summary assumes is the continuity between the life of the church and the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to the early disciples. Although couched in terms of the reality and practices of the early church such as the interpretation of Scripture, community atmosphere, fellowship in breaking of the bread, the implication seems to include an analogy between the context in which faith in the resurrection of Jesus was acquired then and can arise now. Within the limits of his summary, Brunk at least assumes such an analogy between the situation of the church in Luke's time and the dynamic of the Emmaus event. Such an analogy would presumably also arise between the contemporary experience of the gathered Christian community and the disciples from Emmaus gathered in the presence of the resurrected Jesus.

These conclusions (or assumptions) differ markedly from an understanding of analogy which makes non-biblical categories of understanding primary, grants greater credibility to historical events similar in kind rather than to "unique" occurrences, and discounts the historical reality of what cannot be grasped by the contemporary community of critical historians. The concept of analogy is therefore one of the critical issues in historical method. For Troeltsch (as well as Bultmann, et al.), the historical probability of an event depends upon its similarity with other events of the same kind. If one accepts this assumption, it follows that the historian as critical historian cannot confer historical reality upon an "event" for which there are no known analogies.

Without doubt, the comparison of the new and the unknown with the already known plays an important role in historical understanding as well as in human knowledge generally. If we have not the remotest experience of something, we cannot conceive what it is like. An historian quite properly interprets new data in the light of present understanding, whereby

"present understanding" includes much more than what has been mediated directly through empirical, first-hand experience. Thus, without analogy, it is impossible to understand the past. On the other hand, however, if the principle of analogy is employed with the rigor of Troeltsch (and his theological descendants), it seems impossible to do justice to the uniqueness of Christ as portrayed by the Bible. According to Van Harvey, "this dilemma" seems to inform much "discussion in contemporary Protestant theology over the nature of hermeneutics."¹⁵

Perhaps more directly than any other Protestant theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg has addressed himself to this apparent dilemma with respect to analogy. Pannenberg argues against the rigid and restrictive use of analogy by distinguishing between analogy as an instrument of historical research, on the one hand, and as the key to an anti-theistic world-view or ontology, on the other hand. According to Pannenberg, Troeltsch's assumption that the principle of analogy requires a "fundamental homogeneity of all historical events"¹⁶ raises the method of analogy to a criterion of ontological possibility. Pannenberg counters by maintaining that:

The cognitive power of analogy depends upon the fact that it teaches us to see contents of the same kind in nonhomogeneous things [das Gleichartige im Ungleichartigen]. If the historian keeps his eye on the nonexchangeable individuality and contingency of an event, then he will see that he is dealing with nonhomogeneous things, which cannot be contained without remainder in any analogy. Provided that historical science is occupied above all with the particularity and uniqueness of phenomena, its interests must therefore be focused more upon the ever peculiar, nonhomogeneous features, rather than the common ones first obtruded by analogies.

...the cognitive power of analogy in historical study...is greater, the more sharply the limitation¹⁷ of the analogy is recognized in each case.

Pannenberg suggests that within Christian theology historical research should focus on the individual, the particular, and the contingent. Pannenberg goes on to say:

That a reported event bursts analogies with otherwise usual or repeatedly attested events is still no ground for disputing its facticity. It is another matter when positive analogies to forms of tradition (such as myths and even legends) relating to unreal objects, phenomena referring to states of consciousness (like visions) may be found in the historical sources. In such cases historical understanding guided by analogy can lead to a negative judgment about the reality of the occurrences reported in the tradition. Such a judgment will be rendered not because of the unusualness of something reported about, but rather because it exhibits a positive analogy to some form of consciousness which has no objective referent.¹⁸

Pannenberg thus apparently offers an understanding of analogy which reassuringly makes room for the "facticity" of the resurrection, even if it "bursts analogies" of otherwise usual and repeatedly attested events.¹⁹ Rather than disallowing the historicity of Jesus' resurrection because it conforms to nothing within our present, critically informed beliefs of the world, Pannenberg's understanding of analogy would appear to reinstate the historical possibility (not necessarily however the probability) of the resurrection. If however historical research could demonstrate that the New Testament accounts of the resurrection correspond to forms of historical tradition which in turn relate to "unreal objects," a negative judgment on the resurrection would be forthcoming.²⁰

I would suggest that Pannenberg's distinction between analogy as a help in understanding historical events and as ontological criterion of historical possibility can be taken as a corrective to the positivistic assumptions of Troeltsch. Furthermore, his contention that the unusualness of an occurrence may not be taken a priori as an argument against its reality is appropriate. Nevertheless, Pannenberg's understanding of analogy is embedded in a comprehensive view of "universal history" which may in turn evacuate the particular content of the resurrection reality. The biblical understanding of history and the uniqueness of particular biblical events hardly corresponds to a universal-historical

frame of reference within which they receive their definitive significance.

Characteristic for the biblical view of history is rather that very specific individual events arise as direction-giving points of reference for broad periods, and that from there material finds its place and historical questioning and thinking finds its response.²¹

This "perspectival" view may indeed correspond more adequately to the biblical witnesses than a developmental, existential, or universal-historical point of view. Moreover, Pannenberg continues to assume that the only reliable way to knowledge of the past is that of historical-critical research.²²

This may amount to a mistake similar to what Pannenberg found in Troeltsch, namely that of translating one methodological tool which can be useful within certain limits into a criterion of historical reality. Brunk's description of the resurrection as both an eschatological and historical "event," as in part accessible to historical research, and in part eluding it, points in a direction which seems to me better corresponds to the biblical narrative. A view of the resurrection which relegates it to a solely eschatological reality (however defined) without objective referents in time and space cannot do justice to the witness of the early church. But a view of the resurrection which limits our knowledge of it to what is accessible by historical research (however defined) is hardly more adequate.

An acceptable understanding of "analogy" as an instrument of biblical interpretation, I suggest, needs to take the context of interpretation into account. As long as the concept of analogy remains primarily a formal epistemological notion, the content of what is historically "analogous" or "unique" will usually be defined in terms of a particular "world view." For Troeltsch and others, an understanding of the world as a continuum of cause-and-effect-relations ("correlation") provided the frame of reference for analogies which could be drawn between the present and the past. For Pannenberg, an understanding of the world as an open and future-directed totality of historical occurrences remains the point of reference for what may be considered historical analogies or within which unique events find their function. But if Brunk's interpretation of the resurrection is an

example of a proper use of analogy, the normative point of reference will not be the totality of a particular "world" view, but the church as both an historical and a spiritual reality. We sometimes use the notion of the "hermeneutical community" to suggest that the locus of scriptural interpretation is most properly the church, or that all members of the church should participate in the interpretation of Scripture, rather than limiting this task to the specialists alone.

But the reality of the "hermeneutical community" goes beyond merely a functional dimension; it also includes an epistemological dimension and an historical/spiritual dimension. As such the church today as an historical reality and directed by the Holy Spirit becomes the place of analogy with the New Testament Church, rather than the contemporary world being seen as the place of analogy with the ancient world at the time of the New Testament. As Millard Lind puts it:

...by accepting the congregation as the context for the Bible's life situation, the process is quite a different one from that in which it is assumed that there is no twentieth-century life situation in which the Bible is truly at home. If the latter is true, the hermeneutical process is indeed questionable and largely meaningless. It is only within the life situation of the hermeneutical community that the fundamental analogies are experienced which make the Bible historically credible.²³

This is not to suggest that the reality of the Christian community and its perception of reality are at all points distinct from its historical environment. But it would suggest that the primary point of reference for analogies between present and past events is the "church" rather than the "world." At certain points those realities overlap, at others they are distinct. The sometimes similar, sometimes conflicting views of what may be "historically possible" therefore depend also upon the reality and perception of the community in question.

NOTES

1. Klaus Scholder, Ursprünge und Probleme der Bibelkritik im 17. Jahrhunderte (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1966), p. 9.

2. See, e.g., Brevard Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), p. 141; Van Austin Harvey, The Historian and the Believer, The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 33ff.; Edgar Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp. 55f.; Gerhard Maier, The End of the Historical-Critical Method (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), p. 11; Wolfhart Pannenberg, Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays, Vol.I (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 40.

3. See, e.g., George Eldon Ladd, The New Testament and Criticism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1967), p. 33.

4. Ernst Troeltsch, "Historische und Dogmatische Methode in der Theologie," in Gesammelte Schriften, Vol.II (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1913), pp. 729ff. (Author's translation.)

5. Ferdinand Hahn, "Problems historischer Kritik," ZNW 63 (1972), 13.

6. Harvey, p. 40.

7. Ibid., p. 41.

8. Ibid., p. 42.

9. Troeltsch, p. 732.

10. See for example, Colin Brown, "History and the Believer," in History, Criticism and Faith edited by Colin Brown (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), p. 171ff.; Maier, p. 51; Pannenberg, pp. 44ff.; Harvey, p. 40.

11. George Brunk III, "The Concept of the Resurrection according to the Emmaus Account in Luke's Gospel" (ThD Diss., Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1975), pp. 396ff.

12. Cf. ibid., pp. 414f.

13. Cf. ibid., p. 384.

14. Ibid., pp. 387, 391, 409, et. al.

15. Harvey, p. 32.

16. Troeltsch, p. 732.

17. Pannenberg, pp. 46f.

18. Ibid., 48f.

19. Cf. Brown, p. 172.

20. Pannenberg, p. 48f.; cf. Ted Peters, "The Use of Analogy in Historical Method," CBQ (Oct 1973), 475-82.

21. Hahn, p. 16.

22. Pannenberg, p. 53.

23. Millard Lind, "Reflections on Biblical Hermeneutics," in Kingdom, Cross and Community, ed. Richard Burkholder and Calvin Redekop, (Scottdale; Herald Press, 1976), p. 94 and p. 155 in this volume.

BEYOND THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

Willard M. Swartley

In his 1980 presidential address to the centennial meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Old Testament scholar Bernhard W. Anderson called biblical scholars to both utilize and go beyond the historical-critical method in their study of Scripture:

During the [last] century of [the Society's] growth and service, much academic water has gone under the bridge and, as they say, many academic bridges have gone under the water. Perceptive members now say that the Society has reached a turning point, when "our fundamental methodologies for interpreting biblical texts" are in question and when even "the historical-critical method, in various forms the dominant modus operandi since the Enlightenment, is under fire from many directions."¹

Recognizing the important contribution that the study of tradition history has made to our understanding of the biblical text--and the crucial role that various critical methods have played in our understanding of that history, Anderson called biblical scholars, however, to a more serious regard for the final (canonical) form of the biblical text. He urged scholars to move through criticism to "the second naivete," a post-critical posture toward the text in which the text speaks to us with full power. Anderson extended the challenge of Paul Ricoeur who, already in 1960 in the conclusion of his hermeneutical study The Symbolism of Evil, signaled this new direction: "Beyond the desert of criticism we wish to be called again."² In introducing Ricoeur's essays twenty years later, Lewis Mudge wrote:

This longing is shared today by the many for whom [the] historical-critical method remains indispensable, but at the same time insufficient to bring us to a "post

critical moment" of openness to the biblical summons. Is there an intellectually responsible way through the critical sands, always shifting, sometimes abrasive, to an oasis where bedrock, with its springs of water for the spirit, once again appears?

A similar sentiment has appeared on numerous fronts of biblical scholarship during the 1970's. Most radical of all was the conservative German Lutheran Gerhard Maier's call for The End of the Historical-Critical Method.⁴ Arguing against the possibility of discovering "a canon within canon" by which critical evaluative judgments are made and the trend to separate Scripture into divine (more authoritative) and human (less authoritative) compartments, Maier called for a "historical-biblical" method in which the authority of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, and the church's spiritual experience function as the major determinants in interpretation.⁵

Preceding the appearance of Maier's challenge, Walter Wink wrote that "historical biblical criticism is bankrupt."⁶ While Wink held it necessary that the historical-critical method continue in biblical studies (a return to fundamentalist assumptions is impossible), Wink's critique was very harsh: biblical criticism "was based on an inadequate method, married to a false objectivism, subjected to uncontrolled technologism, [and] separated from a vital community; [it] has outlived its usefulness as presently practiced." Wink then called for a radical altering of the method, indeed a new paradigm, in which the critical distantiation/objectification of the text becomes part of two additional stages: critical analysis of the interpreter followed by communion between text and interpreter, the goal of interpretation. This then will enable Scripture to become alive, illumine our present, and generate personal and social transformation.⁸

Two Tübingen University New Testament professors have also issued deep and penetrating criticisms of the historical-critical method. Martin Hengel, calling for recognition of the adequacy and reliability of New Testament sources for the history-writing of early Christianity (especially when compared to sources used in other ancient history-writing), argued that it is questionable to

speak of "the historical-critical method;" in reality there are many historical methods and this corresponds to the multi-faceted nature of history itself. The so-called historical-critical method cannot establish value-free facts; all historical information is inextricably intertwined with value-perspectives. The biblical writings possess the double character of historical sources and faith-witnesses; hence we must utilize historical-theological exegesis in study, deliberately holding together historical and theological interests.

Recognizing also the inadequacies of the historical-critical method, Peter Stuhlmacher, Hengel's colleague, proposed several significant new directions for the historical-critical hermeneutical task. First, we must commit ourselves to "a hermeneutic of consent (Einverständnis):" we will best fulfill our obligation to the tradition in which we stand and to the certainty of truth for the present when we seek to practice a method of interpretation which in its historical outcome (Wirkungsgeschichte) enables consent, i.e., life-conformity, to the biblical text. This assumes that Scripture is directed to the learning and living of the church, which thus provides both the context and goal of interpretation.¹¹

Second, the method of interpretation must have as its starting point correspondence with the nature of the biblical text and must enable the interpreter to communicate with the scholarly world of the present era. The four principles of the historical-critical method enunciated by E. Troeltsch (doubt, analogy, correlation, and religious subjectivity) are not adequate. To these must be added the principle of accepting the report (Vernehmens, which Schlatter called "der Wahrnehmung"). Though this sets up a tension with Troeltsch's principles, it is essential to maintain this point if the new and unique claims of biblical revelation are to be grasped.¹²

Third, the goal of interpretation is to blend the horizon of the text with that of the interpreter in light of the church's tradition and confession.¹³ Stuhlmacher recognizes the tension between this point and the Protestant principle which Gerhard Ebeling identified as the basis for the necessity of the historical-critical method, namely, that all tradition must be judged at the bar of Scripture.¹⁴ It is essential, on the one hand, for biblical

interpretation always to be conscious of the tradition of the church--since this itself arises from biblical interpretation and informs subsequent interpretation. On the other hand, the task of biblical interpretation requires continual critical evaluation of the tradition. The interpreter cannot withdraw from this task; otherwise interpretation falls victim to dogmatics, the history of tradition itself, or the faith of the community and thus reneges on its calling to bring all of these into critical encounter with the source and ground of their legitimacy, the Scripture.¹⁵

Fourth, the testing and authentication (Bewährung) of interpretation occurs in the praxis of faith. This occurs three ways: in personal and corporate (Gemeinde) meditation upon the text from which come vision and power for living; through preaching the word, which powerfully witnesses to the faith--such textual exposition is preaching's legitimation; and through living faithfully the love, righteousness, reconciliation, and peace of the gospel.¹⁶

Finally, Stuhlmacher proposes that reconciliation (Versöhnung) is central to New Testament thought. By recognizing this we can thus discover the basic lines of unity for New Testament theology. He proposes this to be a hermeneutical key, a canon within the canon. In concluding his work and in two other volumes, Stuhlmacher seeks to show how reconciliation (Versöhnung) is present in¹⁷ the variety of literature found in the New Testament.

With these new directions calling us beyond the historical-critical method, it is essential to assess the method. Shall we, can we live with it, or without it?

ASSESSMENT: CONTRIBUTIONS AND DEFICIENCIES OF THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

Informed by the work of these several writers and other critiques of the historical-critical method as well, especially the assessment of the method by Edgar Krentz,¹⁸ I here identify its contributions and deficiencies. Krentz has identified ten achievements and ten inadequacies of the historical-critical method. The ten achievements are:

1. Critical scholars have provided a wealth of useful research tools: grammars, lexica,

concordances, original text editions, theological dictionaries, commentaries, and histories. They have pioneered in critical methods of study that inform these resources.

2. Through critical study of the world of the Bible, the Ancient Near East and the Graeco-Roman world, biblical scholars have illumined the geographical and historical context of Israel and the early church.

3. Critical study has given us a "better grasp of the original grammatical and historical sense of the Bible."

4. "The time-conditioned, historical character of the Bible has been made evident."

5. Biblical criticism has enabled us to enter into the world of the Bible, strange and foreign as it really is; it points up and respects the gap between that world and ours.

6. Historical criticism has enabled "the Scriptures to exercise their proper critical function in the church" so that the Bible speaks its own message afresh, without dogmatic traditions and church history determining its message.

7. Historical criticism has proven itself to be self-correcting. Theories are tested, confirmed or modified, retained or discarded in the face of further evidence.

8. Historical criticism has effected significant change in theological insight, especially in pointing up the rich variety in biblical thought, testing in turn dogmatic schemes of thematic unity.

9. With historical criticism has come also the increased awareness that the Bible cannot be separated from history; it must be read historically and then interpreted for today.

10. Since historical criticism yields only probable results, the relativity of its claims protects against historicism, guards against rationalist, positivist proofs for faith, and acknowledges "'that there is truth that cannot be demonstrated by historical proofs.'"¹⁹

The ten "objections and modifications" are:

1. The historical-critical method is secular and profane and is not able to handle the biblical claims of divine revelation and unique events in history.

2. Since faith claims cannot be handled by the historical-critical method, use of the method by believing historians leads to intellectual dualism.

3-7. These five points consist of modifications which represent efforts to respect both faith and history in the use of the historical-critical method. History does not exist apart from perspective and significance; this opens the door to faith's interpretation. Some scholars also call for a redefinition of history that includes divine action. Further, the principle of analogy is not omniscient; the resurrection of Jesus as an historical event has no analogy. And objectivity in research does not require neutrality, nor does it mean that the interpreter has no presuppositions.

8. Biblical critics continue to disagree over the appropriateness or necessity of evaluating the content of a text as to its veracity. The extent to which criticism stands over the text continues disputed.

9. Historical criticism tends to exalt itself as the only way to read the Bible.

10. Historical research objectifies the claims of the text, distancing the text from the reader, thus frustrating the effort to read the Bible as revelation to/for the church.²⁰

Krentz ends his assessment with a tempered optimistic note for the future of biblical criticism in the church:

Historical criticism in the service of the gospel and the mission of the church is the ecclesiastical ideal. Historical criticism in the service of verifiable fact placed into a significant narrative is the historian's ideal. The possible conflict between these two ideals can be resolved only in the person of the interpreter living in the community of faith who combines dedication to historical truth with the recognition of his own humanity and need for forgiveness. Historical research like all of man's efforts is also perverted by sin. But in the community of scholarship that lives in the fellowship of the people of God the errors that arise from human frailty can be corrected and sins forgiven by God's grace. Then biblical criticism will grow together with faith into the full measure of the stature of

Christ, his Gospel, his Word and his Holy Scripture.²¹

Reflection upon these contributions and inadequacies yields provocative observations. What is regarded as its strength, distancing the text from the interpreter's bias and the tradition of the church so it can speak its own word, turns out also to be a weakness by objectifying the claims of the text and frustrating what Wink called communion with the text. Similarly, historical criticism's achievement in freeing the Scripture from dogma in order to function critically for theology, tradition, and the congregation turns out to be also a liability in that the method itself has no way of affirming the biblical faith claims, or validating such claims as revelation for the believing community. Further, historical criticism's contribution in relativizing all historical knowledge, thus saving faith from historicism and rationalist positivism, in turn provides no secure footing for faith to affirm divine steadfastness and covenant truth.

What then shall be said of the method and its appropriateness for use by scholars of faith? Some type of historical method is indeed essential to the study of biblical historical texts. This is so not because the facticity or historical authenticity of the biblical narrative-borne history²² must be established or proven. The historical-critical method can neither prove nor falsify unique revelatory events; further, the use of the method for these purposes often puts the scholar at cross-purposes with the text; the text is not being heard as it was meant to be heard.²³ The concern for verification must look in other directions. Peter Stuhlmacher has identified some of these above and I have addressed this issue elsewhere.²⁴

Rather, some type of historical method--and one that makes critical judgments--is necessary for the following reasons:

1. An historical method is essential because the biblical story happened in history over a period of several thousand years. The study and understanding of this story, as James Barr points out, requires the sequencing or layering of historical traditions and the setting of these traditions in specific historical contexts.²⁵ Barr aptly notes that the word 'historical' means "the reconstruction of spatial-temporal events in the past" and this implies

the word 'critical,' because it inquires into the sequence of the events spoken of by the text or the sequence of events giving rise to the text itself.²⁶

It may be argued that such historical comprehension of texts, or of the story as a whole, is unnecessary because texts are self-contained units of meaning (structuralist theory, see below) which is apprehended via the commonality of human experience (see the "air routes" in Janzen's article above). Or, with only slightly more persuasiveness, at least to me, it may be argued that historical study is necessary, but that the critical part must be left out. But consistency on this point would exclude textual criticism along with the various investigations of biblical criticism. For the principles used in the internal evidence of text-criticism are basically the same as those used in so-called higher criticism. Upon these principles the comparative reliability of the manuscripts has been established. B. H. Streeter's epoch-making study, The Four Gospels (1924) amply demonstrates the interlocking relationship between text-criticism theory and Gospel source theory. In my judgment, it is impossible to avoid the critical component in biblical studies. The legitimacy of the role of reason must be acknowledged and affirmed, and it should be used to criticize both text and interpreter, including rationalistic assumptions and many others we might bring to the text.

This process of historical sequencing is necessary, first and foundationally, to make sense out of the whole story, whether that be through such basic data as the chronological sequence of Abraham-Moses-Isaiah-Jesus or the theological grasp of a promise-fulfillment shape for biblical revelation. But these historical learnings are readily evident from the canonical form of the text. Examples which show, in increasing uncertainty in my judgment, the role of critical judgments are:

- the major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) come earlier in the historical sequencing than do Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

- Paul was not the author of Hebrews (on basis of literary style).

- Isaiah 40-55 has a later historical context than does Isaiah 1-39, and chs. 56-66 appear to have a still later place in chronological sequencing.

- The Gospels were written after the Pauline letters.

- The Pastoral Epistles, on the basis of content analysis, were written by Paul's disciples, not Paul himself.

- The Pentateuch consists of a mosaic authorship, (i.e. sources) not Mosaic authorship, though it certainly carries Mosaic authority.

- The chronological order in which the Gospels were written is Mark, Matthew, Luke, John.

- The problems of 1 Corinthians 11-14 were caused by Gnostic-type enthusiasm in Corinth with women leading the ecstatic, charismatic developments.²⁷

Some scholars accept these statements as virtually conclusive; others demur and remind us that all historical investigation gives only more or less probable results, and these might vary from 95% to 58% in degree of probability. Then arises the question: how do we base faith and life-practice upon a foundation which is only 58% assured? This may, of course, be answered either by: (1) almost all the points above have no immediate consequence for practical faith and life anyway--but this is short-sighted in view of my second major point below, (2) if before critical examination faith was based upon knowledge 100% unexamined, a 58% certainty is really after all a more assured position--but this assumes that historical-critical study is the major source of verification, a point with which I could not agree,²⁸ or (3) the appropriate response as I see it, the nature of the biblical testimony is forever embedded in history and thus presents a challenge, and perhaps offense, to both the modern historian and believer. Revelation in history thus requires our belief to ride to some extent upon the waves of historical reconstruction, for Christian truth cannot be distilled out of the historical, cultural matrix in which it came nor in which it must be expressed today. Changing understandings about individual historical elements in the Bible affect--and usually enrich--our overall perception of the biblical story. For legitimate reasons God's people sometimes revise their views and positions accordingly (witness the Reformation). Biblical study should result in real learnings and behavioral change. Unfortunately, past assumptions regarding critical study have tilted too heavily toward rationalist agenda rather than toward practical behavioral agenda and, for this reason, have

produced the cleavage between the pulpit and the pew and not effected social transformation.

Because historical study of the Bible has so often been seduced by this rationalistic agenda of proof or disproof, by fundamentalists and liberals alike, the positive values of historical critical study have been hijacked and commandeered to a host of noncanonically ticketed destinations, such as: the use of factual discrepancies to disprove the Bible's authority or, conversely, the harmonization of such discrepancies to bolster our faith in the Bible's "inerrancy;" the dispute over miracles, in which 16th century natural law categories played umpire; or whether belief stands or falls with particular theories of source analysis. The proper destination of critical historical study, rather, lies in the discovery that divine revelation expressed itself authoritatively in a variety of human historical situations with diverse accents--which a propositionalist may see, unfortunately, as detrimental contradictions. As I have argued in my study of case issues,²⁹ this quite fundamental characteristic of the biblical text demonstrates its historical and cultural vitality. It is God's missionary principle, part and parcel of incarnational revelation and the canonical community's contextualized faithful witness to what God continues to do through what he has done.

2. When critical historical study undertakes its task from this angle of vision, a second significant contribution--which confronts us also as necessity--falls into focus. The diversity of Scripture in its particularized historical and cultural expressions enables us as interpreters to enter into the intra-canonical dialogue and critique. Strands of thought and tradition interact, cross-fertilize and at times compete. Critical assessment of this multi-instrumental choir is essential. We observe that Jesus identified with certain Old Testament traditions and turned others on their heads. Paul appealed to both traditions of creation and redemption, setting them even in dialectical juxtaposition (1 Cor. 11:3-11).

Any attempt to discern the biblical word on socio-ethical issues such as slavery and war, sabbath observance and male/female role relationships requires an historical and critical study of the canon's pluriform testimony. Otherwise, slavery stands, war

wins, and Jesus weeps. Entering into, hearing and discerning the intra-canonical dialogue is a necessity for believers who take the Bible as an authoritative guide for living. An historical, critical method of study, sensitive to the Bible's intentions and the church's faith, is a--even the--necessary way.

3. But, and here I register a most basic critique and defense of the critical study of Scripture, the agenda of (the) historical critical method(s) has been too narrowly conceived. If we take our clues from Jesus on this topic, we must speak of an historically critical moral method of Bible study. On the divorce question (Mk. 10:1-10) Jesus not only drew upon his perception of the historical sequencing of Genesis 2 and Deuteronomy 24, but he was guided also by moral discernment: what conforms to God's will for humanity. Likewise, the antitheses (Mt. 5:17-48) show Jesus going behind the letter of the text in order to grasp God's moral intention. Similarly, he rebukes the Pharisees for failing to discern "the weightier matters of the law" (Mt. 23:23, emphasis mine).

If historical critical method is to serve the life of the church and enable the church to fulfill its prophetic role in society, then it must be converted in this Jesus direction. Such moral criticism of Scripture is further a sine qua non for responsible engagement and discernment of the intracanonical dialogue and critique.

4. However, a critical-historical method is necessary also in order to enable us as interpreters to submit our own prejudices, tradition, and pre-established beliefs to a fresh encounter with Scripture as divine Word. The world of the text with its strangeness and the text itself with its distinctive word must be first heard and comprehended before it can speak to and critique our thoughts, being, and situation in life. To regard this point only as the Protestant principle, the savior from ecclesiastical dogma and tradition, as Ebeling has done,³⁰ is to too narrowly focus its significance. The horizon of our lives that needs the criticism of the Scripture is broader than the landscape of tradition. Liberation and feminist hermeneutics have taught us and are teaching us that our economic, social, political, and gender biases ³¹ must also bow before Scripture's critique and authority.

In summary then, a critical historical method is necessary, but its limited scope and potential seducement toward illusory agenda, must be kept clearly in mind. For these reasons, my own proposals for method have introduced considerations and processes that go beyond the old tasks of the method and point toward fruitful transforming consequences.³² Biblical study may not stop with a descriptive statement of past tense reality, however well-deserved. Not until horizons blend and springs of water refresh parched spirits has the Christian task of biblical interpretation achieved its goal.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

In an article in Christian Century (Oct 28, 1981) David L. Bartlett identified five new directions or emphases in biblical interpretation. These also, for the most part, beckon us to go beyond the historical-critical method, or at least majorly modify the agenda on its program.

1. A focus upon the social world of the biblical text (Gager, Wilson, Gottwald, Theissen), through which we today might grasp analogically what our society and community might be like as we reflect upon the community(ies) that produced the texts.

2. Psychological reflection upon the text (Rubenstein, Scroggs, Wink), which by focusing upon the structures of the mind and self-assessment underlying the texts can enable us to find healing for our own broken selves.

3. Sociological and psychological [and economic and political] analysis of the interpreter (Cone, Segundo, Schüssler-Fiorenza), which calls interpreters, despite the heralded objectivity of the historical-critical method, to take seriously their own biases and prejudices which affect their understandings of the text.

4. New models of literary study of the texts, consisting of those focusing upon the shape and structure of the text to determine its meaning (Wilder, Crossan, Via, McFague, Tolbert, et al.) and those focusing upon larger units of total narrative structure and themes (Kermode, Peterson, Fowler).

5. Canonical criticism (Childs, Sanders), which takes seriously the life of the community in forming the canon (Sanders) and the authority of

intracanonical dialogue for understanding specific texts.³³

Bartlett's analysis provides a helpful overview of recent developments; my own categorization and description of these new directions offers some alternative perceptions. I propose three major emerging directions: interpretive emphases seeking greater accountability to theology, tradition, and the church; interpretive emphases arising from language itself together with influences from linguistics and the literary nature of texts; and interpretive emphases arising from socio-cultural analyses, be they of the social world of the text or the social world of the interpreter. In numerous cases the fruits of these latter two emphases also serve the interests of the first category, making the texts more meaningful to the church and more theologically accountable.

A. Contributions Calling for More Theological and Churchly Accountability

For first mention here are the two well-known Yale scholars, Paul S. Minear and Brevard Childs, and James Smart as well.³⁴ Theology Today provided the forum for Paul Minear to enter into dialogue with scholars and church leaders on this subject in two related articles: "Ecumenical Theology--Profession or Vocation" (April 1976, 66-73) and "Symposium on Biblical Criticism" (Jan 1977, 354-367). In the latter article, thirteen biblical scholars were asked to address five key questions (formulated by editor Hugh T. Kerr):

- (1) does biblical criticism tend to avoid the big, basic theological issues, (2) do you think biblical scholarship has any influence on theology and the church, (3) what is criticism's constructive role, (4) how is your own personal faith involved in your research, (5) where will biblical scholarship move next, and⁵⁵ what contribution would you like to make?

Most, though not all, responses represented concern for greater theological and churchly accountability. Several focused on the need for even more critical investigation of texts as the only safeguard against theological imperialism and a sterile churchly relevance that misses the real needs of the world. Minear's basic concern, however, that biblical scholars and theologians anchor their work in

their vocation, their calling as Christian scholars, was clearly registered.³⁶

Brevard Child's concern has been marked by demonstrable exegetical contributions. In his Biblical Theology in Crisis³⁷ he articulated not only a problem but suggested a new approach to Scripture which has come to be known as "canonical criticism." The canon makes the Bible the church's book; one text is to be understood via dialogue with the larger canonical voice on the subject. In this way the biblical text functions authoritatively for the church. Child's commentary on Exodus³⁸ demonstrated further the necessary interconnection between Scripture and tradition by systematically showing how the various texts in Exodus have been understood in the tradition of believing communities. Scripture is thus not objectified into an archaic past but represented in life through its influence upon tradition impinging upon our own selves and our life worlds.

Closely allied to and perhaps even foundational to the concerns of Minear and Childs has been the work of James A. Sanders, with echoes in James Barr's contributions. Sander's work, focusing on the process of canonization,³⁹ has emphasized that "the believing community always was and always will be the proper Sitz im Leben of canon"⁴⁰ and that the canonical quality of Scripture gives it certain features: remembered significance and repeated use in the community, acquisition of new meanings (resignification) as it is repeated in new contexts, consequent multivalence and pluralism yielding diversity which should be viewed as enriching rather than threatening the integrity of the tradition--⁴¹ the failure of both fundamentalism and liberalism, a built-in constraint allowing for adaptability but also assuring essential stability, and demonstration of hermeneutic principles at work.⁴² With similar emphases, James Barr says,

The Bible takes its origin from within the life of believing communities; it is interpreted within the continuing life of these communities; the standard of its religious interpretation is the structure of faith which these communities maintain; and it has the task of providing a challenge, a force for innovation and a

source of purification, to the life of
these communities.⁴³

The contributions of Martin Hengel and Peter Stuhlmacher noted above, though with some differing emphases, move in the same direction, namely the effort to make the work of biblical criticism more serviceable to the church. Hengel calls for a reappraisal of the assumptions and criteria of the historical-critical method(s); he asks scholars to use a method in harmony with the history-faith nature of the texts. Stuhlmacher's call to accept the report (Vernehmens) and to place interpretation in dialogue with one's tradition/confession contributes directly to interpretation's accountability to the theology and the life of the church. Similarly, Walter Wink's fundamental concern and proposal for a new paradigm witnesses directly to this concern, though his psychological model cannot carry the task, in my judgment.⁴⁴

A helpful contribution to this direction of concern is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's article, "'For the Sake of Our Salvation'... Biblical Interpretation as Theological Task."⁴⁵ After identifying the predominant models (or paradigm methods) for biblical interpretation in recent centuries as dogmatic and historical, she calls for a new paradigm, a "pastoral-theological paradigm." This method of interpretation would integrate both the historical and dogmatic models but would "radically question the presupposition that value-free, neutral and uncommitted exegetical work is possible."⁴⁶ This use of the Bible would put the pastoral situation and our theological response to it in creative tension with historical and theological study of Scripture. It would profit much from biblical study that seeks to show how texts are concrete responses to specific needs within the community of faith, (such as redactional and social world studies).⁴⁷ Training for such scholarship would need to include systematic reflection upon one's own presuppositions or prejudices as well as upon those of scholarly interpretations. Schüssler-Fiorenza concludes by calling for an institutional basis, presently lacking in America, to support such biblical study.⁴⁸

George T. Montague's excellent 1978 presidential address to the Catholic Biblical Association of America calls also for the same direction of movement in biblical studies and teaching, showing major

influence from the contributions of both Paul Ricoeur and Bernard Longeran. From Ricoeur we learn that communication, important to teaching, is itself part of the hermeneutical process; the word-event of interpretation-communication is generated by the word-event of the text. Noting that Ricoeur's model presupposes the (a) community as part of the interpretive word-event, Montague questions why the current hermeneutical discussion does not give more attention to "the community which the word-event creates and how that community affects the interpretation of the word."⁴⁹ Montague criticizes the private interpretation model and appeals to Longeran's concern for "discernment" in interpretation. Interpretation within a discerning community will better identify the "arrow" of the text, provide "a corrective and a supportive matrix for hearing or reading the word," and uncover the meaning and life-transforming power of the text here and now.⁵⁰ This use of the word will lead also to corporate celebration of the word. Finally, Montague proposes a method of eleven steps for biblical interpretation, ending with "doing,"⁵¹ Scripture's final call to praxis.

B. More Attention to Language, Linguistic and Literary Dimensions

Growing out of several philosophical roots and focused⁵² especially in the work of Hans Georg Gadamer, the decade of the seventies has heard a chorus of voices calling for more serious attention to language itself and the biblical text as it is in its literary power with its distinctive structures of meaning. Some forms of this emphasis react strongly to the use of texts for historical information, looking through texts as windows to get to reconstructed history behind the text. Rather, the text itself as a mirror reflects essential meaning, stands on its own with its distinctive life-world, and addresses us in such a way as to incorporate us--and we also incorporate it--into a new creative word-event. In the new hermeneutic, prominent in the latter sixties and early seventies,⁵³ the language event of interpretation was viewed as a new word-event, the blending of the text and interpreter into a creative new historical Gestalt. Language is not the object⁵⁴ of interpretation, but the vehicle of interpretation.

The contributions of Paul Ricoeur, standing within this stream of emphasis and drawing upon insights--but also critical--of structuralism, blend together the literary and linguistic approaches to biblical study. Ricoeur's model for the interpreter's hearing of the text consists of three fundamental stages of encounter: the reading of the text to enter its life-world, the confronting of the text to grasp the meaning of its testimony (the critical stage), and the text's encountering of the interpreter (the post-critical, second naiveté). Such encounter with texts puts interpretation in the service of hope and freedom; it enables the text to appeal directly to our will and action. The fruit of interpretation therefore is not simply one more idea about the past (what some ancient thought or said), but the joining of the text's and interpreter's horizons for a new experience of meaning and living.

At least four fronts of exploration and work have contributed to a quite diverse group of literary-oriented allies: redaction criticism beginning in the late fifties in Europe and flourishing internationally in the last two decades; structuralism beginning in the sixties with a relatively small but ardent group of advocates; rhetorical criticism evident in the trajectory running through James Muilenberg, Amos Wilder, and Phyllis Tribble, whose book, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, most ably demonstrates the fruit of this yet inadequately described method; and an art approach to literary narrative, beckoning us to open ourselves to a text's pluriform meanings via inspired imagination. A fifth emphasis, known as reader-oriented criticism, should perhaps be mentioned here as well; current emphases call for understanding through oral reading and hearing of the text.⁵⁵

Within the scope of this article, it is impossible to describe adequately the significant contributions of these approaches, much less assess each for its strengths and limitations. This survey will need, therefore, to restrict itself to a limited sketch, identifying only the prominent literature and general contours.

1. Redaction criticism put forth its bud with major works on the Synoptic Gospels; Hans Conzelmann on Luke (1953),⁵⁶ Willi Marxsen on Mark (1956),⁵⁷ Bornkamm, Barth and Held on Matthew (1963, though earlier forms of Bornkamm's essays date back to 1948 and 1954).⁵⁸ A helpful survey and evaluative

analyses of these and other redactional studies on the Synoptic Gospels is to be found in Joachim Rohde's Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists (1968). A more recent anthology of contributions is available also in Interpreting the Gospels (1981), edited by James Mays.

Because of the synoptic relationship between the first three Gospels and the scholarly acceptance of interdependent sources in these Gospels, redactional criticism has flourished most in Synoptic studies. Aspects of the method have been transported into other quarters of the canon as well, but under modified form, often better described as compositional analysis. In its earlier and "purer" form redaction criticism sought to determine the theological viewpoint of the author--not "collector" as in form criticism--by observing either the distinctive patterns of the writers or the peculiarities of the particular Gospel text: additions, omissions, preponderance and seemingly intentional use of term/phrases not in the parallel sources, seams joining together the pericopes, reordering the sequence of stories and teachings, and, quite often, very small, subtle but significant changes. As the "science" matured, the methodology subsumed the more common features of compositional analysis: selection, adaptation, organization, emphases via repetition, and viewpoint. These factors show the distinctive literary character of the text and thus disclose its meaning. The way in which traditional material is used carries the author's intentions as well.

2. Structuralist method, with its roots in the linguistic studies of Ferdinand de Saussure and the anthropological contributions of Claude Levi-Strauss, represents a radical departure from the prevailing canons of biblical criticism. Its focus is upon the text as it is, without regard for either the historical circumstances behind the text or the intentions of the author. A text lives by its own right; meaning lies in the text as mirror, not behind the text as window. Texts are to be understood as participants in cultural givens, whose forms and significations flow from the culture and impose themselves upon writers. Language structure and conventions are not chosen by authors; only words are selected. More is subconsciously given than consciously created. A text has three levels of structure: structures of enunciation (surface

structure), cultural structures, and deep structures. Since the latter two structures are established as givens, a story (in any culture) may be studied according to pre-established structural components (A. Greimas' six actant model, et al.). Synchronic (vertical depth) study of a text takes priority over the diachronic (meaning through time).

The most "user friendly" initiation into this virtually computerized form of literary studies is to be found in Raymond F. Collin's Introduction to the New Testament (Doubleday, 1983, ch. 7) and in an issue of Interpretation (April 1974) devoted to structuralism. Daniel Patte's introduction, What Is Structural Exegesis? (Fortress, 1976) and his later book, co-authored with Aline Patte, Structural Exegesis: From Theory to Practice (Fortress, 1978) are both helpful. The book by Dan O. Via, Jr., Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament: A Structuralist Approach to Hermeneutics, is also quite helpful, especially in distinguishing structuralist literary study from redactional and historically motivated studies, and for maintaining at least a marginal place for the latter. Norman R. Petersen's proposal calling scholars to recognize the essential roles for both methods, as complementary to each other, offers a helpful corrective, in my judgment, although his illustrative textual study in Mark documents his thesis in only a quite limited--and also debatable--way.⁵⁹

3. A third stream of literary emphasis, utilizing aspects of both redactional and structuralist contributions, is rhetorical criticism. Joanna Dewey in her study, Markan Public Debate (1980), describes briefly this method, tracing it to James Muilenberg's 1968 SBL presidential address in which he called for the study of texts as literary compositions, and in such a way that we grasp how the structural patterns stand in the service of "a unified whole." Second, the component parts that constitute the literary fabric of the text and the rhetorical devices employed to mark sequence and movement, shifts or breaks, must be essential dimensions of our study. This twofold approach will thus enable us to achieve the goal of biblical study: to "reveal to us the texture and fabric of the writer's thought, not only what it is that he thinks, but as he thinks it."⁶⁰ This approach to the text, as Dewey aptly states, "does not seek to replace either historical or

theological studies.⁶¹; it hopes rather to provide them with a solid base."

As indicated above, Phyllis Tribble's God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality models this method at work. Joanna Dewey's study of Mark 2:1-3:6 also shows the good fruit of the method and describes basic literary techniques which Mark utilizes in his composition.⁶² Recent contributions in parable study also reflect the fruits of literary structural analysis, e.g., Mary Ann Tolbert's Perspectives on the Parables (Fortress, 1979, see esp. pp. 67-74) and Jan Lambrecht's Once More Astonished: The Parables of Jesus (Crossroad, 1981). As Jan Lambrecht's contribution demonstrates--and note also his earlier structural study of Mark 13,⁶³ this literary-structural approach has come into prominence also in European biblical scholarship, especially in the work of Erhardt Güttgemanns, in his call for a linguistic, Gestalt analysis of the text. The numerous essays in the journal he edits, Linguistica Biblica, and its progenitor, Studia Linguistica Neotestamentica show counterpart features to North American rhetorical criticism, but reflect more philosophical indebtedness, especially to the new hermeneutic--that understanding comes through language--and the linguistic roots of structuralism.

4. Bearing similarities to these developments, current emphases on understanding the Bible as literature and as literary art have become increasingly significant. While the two volume set of essays edited by Kenneth Gros Louis, et al., under the title Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives (Abingdon, 1974, 1982) and Leonard Thompson's Introducing Biblical Literature (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), show the fruits of the literary approach, the two most striking recent contributions--and both emphasize the art dimension of literature--are Northrop Frye's The Great Code (Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1982) and Robert Alter's The Art of Biblical Narrative (Basic Books, 1981).⁶⁴ Neither is kind to traditional historical methods; both call for a radical rethinking of the nature of the biblical text and the methods best suited to grasp its message. But caution must be registered: for when Frye says that the biblical writers were too clever literarily for modern historians who can never find what they're looking for, i.e., good empirical evidence, the converse can also be said: the genre, the plot-pattern, and the

potent mythos--in which the literature expert rejoices--points beyond itself; as narrative it testifies to a real history and a real God whose word-deed in time and space creates life-praxis--historically, socially, economically and politically. The God of the Bible does not merely ride in a literary cloud over the blood and guts of historical struggle and eschatological promise.

Each of these literary approaches and emphases has its power--and I indeed am part devotee--but the half, at least another third, has not yet been told.

C. Sociological Awareness: The Worlds of the Text and the Interpreter

A third major current force in biblical interpretation, showing increasing influence and significance during the last decade, comes from socio-historical and sociological analyses of the world of both the biblical text and the interpreter. A recently published collection of essays, The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics (Orbis, 1983), reflects the variety of contributions. An outline of the types of investigation will enable us to sort through the array of work:

1. Social history/sociological interpretations of the biblical text.

Since studies in this area are quite diverse, several essays survey the literature and assess the method. Two of the more useful such resources are Robin Scrogg's essay, "The Sociological Interpretation of the New Testament: The Present State of Research" (NTS 26 [1980] 164-79) and Bruce Malina's analysis of method, "The Social Sciences and Biblical Interpretation" (Interp 37 [1982], 229-42), both reprinted in Gottwald's collection of essays above.

A second group of studies might be classified as social history. Appearing mostly in the New Testament field, the works of E. A. Judge (The Social Patterns of the Christian Groups in the First Century, 1960), Martin Hengel (Property and Riches in the Early Church, 1974) and Wayne Meeks (The First Urban Christians, 1983) merit special notice. Many other writers could be cited also, but these exemplify well the socio-historical approach. In comparison to the next group to be cited, they represent a more cautious approach; they focus upon the realia and social data in the biblical texts, remain eclectic in use of sociological theories, if used at all, and seek

primarily to show meaningful intersections between early Christian belief and social experience.

A third set of contributions reflect to varying degrees the use of sociological or socio-economic models to reconstruct the history and/or development of ancient Israel or early Christianity. Again, citations must be limited to those most representative of the developments. John Gager's Kingdom and Community (1975) represents the use of sociological cognitive-dissonance (a conflictual model) for reconstructing early Christian origins. Bruce Malina's The New Testament World (1980) seeks to understand five prominent aspects of early Christianity against the grid of structural functionalist, conflict, and symbolic (integrationist) models. Norman Gottwald's Tribes of Israel (1979) combines the conflict model with Marxist economic analysis to reconstruct the history of Israel. Gerd Theissen, though not limiting himself to any one sociological method, uses primarily functional categories to develop a most provocative portrait of both the Jesus movement--viewing Jesus and his first followers as wandering rural charismatics (Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity, 1978)--and Pauline Christianity in Corinth--portraying it as a socially diverse urban group with numerous members of middle to high socio-economic class (The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity, 1981). John Elliott focuses on 1 Peter (A Home for the Homeless, 1982) and draws correlaries between the orphaned plight of the community and its social solidarity in/through suffering.

2. Social analysis of the interpreter's world, a prerequisite to biblical interpretation.

The ground-breaking study in this category is certainly that of José Miranda's Marx and the Bible (1974), which by viewing the biblical text through the lenses of socio-economic realities in today's world turns up biblical exegesis on justice and righteousness unrivaled in its penetrating grasp. His later work, Being and Messiah (1977), contains laser-like exposition of 1 John, splitting previously pious platitudes into two-edged deed-imperatives that distinguish between Christ and anti-Christ belief-behavior.

Three main streams of contribution merit notice:

a. Latin America liberationist hermeneutical perspectives, articulated by such writers as Miranda, Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff and Luis Segundo. American

black liberationist hermeneutic, in the writings of James H. Cone, Major J. Jones, and Hubert Brown, are also part of this emphases. The direct biblical commentary from the oppressed, as presented by Ernesto Cardenal in the four volumes of The Gospel in Solentiname (1975-81) must be considered most significant, for in contrast to writings of the educated, this Bible exposition from the base community represents more authentically the "hermeneutical privilege of the poor," a Grade 1 perception in this school of learning. Not only do these writings insist that we must begin or preface study of the text with an analysis of our social situation, but they also inseparably link knowledge and praxis. The true meaning of the text is grasped from the demand and insight of praxis.

b. Materialist exegesis, originating in Portugal and France, shares many of the emphases of the Latin American liberationist hermeneutic. With roots in the plight of the worker class and anti-clerical persuasions, the writings reflect a distinctive union between historical materialism and structuralism, a two-edged tool for biblical exegesis. The primary representatives of this emphasis are Fernando Belo (Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark, 1974, trans. 1981), Michel Clevenot (Approaches materialistes de la Bible, 1976) and Georges Casalis (Les Idées justus ne tombent pas du ciel, 1977). Kuno Füssel (see Gottwald's book of essays), Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann (see forthcoming The God of the Lowly) have supportively disseminated these contributions. These writings stress that (a) the poor are a primary concern of the Bible, (b) the Bible must be rescued from the hands of people in power, and (c) the Bible must be read to give clarity to political praxis.⁶⁵

c. A third and most significant force for North American scholarship has been feminist liberation hermeneutic. The two most outstanding contributions have been those of Phyllis Trible (God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, 1978) and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (In Memory of Her, 1983). While these writings and many others share the larger liberationist characteristic of "seeing from the underside of history," they do not correlate directly with materialist/Marxist socio-economic philosophical orientation, as do a and b above. Whether it be the egalitarian exegesis of the Genesis narratives

(Trible) or the "discipleship of equals" as central to earliest Christianity (Fiorenza), the growing spate of exegetical work from the feminist perspective has turned up surprisingly keen exegetical insights that for centuries have eluded male interpreters. This work demonstrates that one's social situation does indeed affect the reading of the text.

The text then is not the only focus for biblical interpretation, but both text and interpreter together are under scrutiny, according to all three streams of liberationist hermeneutic. The implications of this are far-reaching for all developments mentioned above.

For this approach to biblical study begins with what is called the "sociology of knowledge." As David Lochhead puts it in his essay, "The Liberation of the Bible": "There can be no escape from this kind of [how our perception is influenced by our place in a complex socio-economic set of relationships] politics of understanding" (Gottwald, ed., p. 86). Further, as Juan Luis Segundo argues in "Faith and Ideologies in Biblical Revelation": hearing the word of the Revealer through socio-economically aware biblical study will create and intensify distinctive faith ideologies (*ibid*, pp. 494-95). Hence biblical study never has the option of functioning in a value-free laboratory. Historical investigations and literary analyses, as well as our theological traditions, are ever "prejudiced," and such "prejudice" is a necessary condition for knowledge.⁶⁶ The term "prejudice" is used here not pejoratively but descriptively to indicate that every interpreter has certain allegiances--religious, socio-economic, political, familial, etc. Until these realities are acknowledged, the wonderfully inviting garden variety of hermeneutical methods remain unpollinated--and fruitless, at the time (kairos) and place (ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ) where it really counts.

Hence the call: while recognizing the necessity of some aspects of historical, critical biblical study, the challenge before biblical scholars is: beyond the historical-critical method!

And the promise: the Spirit gives life;
 whoever wills to do my will,
 shall know...
 and be set free
 to love.

NOTES

1. Bernhard W. Anderson, "Tradition and Scripture in the Church," JBL 100 (Jan 1981), 5-21. Quotation on p. 5.

2. Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 349.

3. Lewis S. Mudge, "Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretation," in Paul Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 1.

4. Gerhard Maier, The End of the Historical-Critical Method, trans. Edwin W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977).

5. For arguments countering the historical-critical method, see Maier, pp. 11-47; for his counter proposals, see pp. 50-92.

6. Walter Wink, The Bible in Human Transformations: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973).

7. Ibid., p. 15.

8. Ibid., the second and third stages are presented in their philosophical depth (pp. 19-46). For his statement of the threefold goal, see p. 2.

9. Martin Hengel, Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 129-136.

10. Peter Stuhlmacher, Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testament: Eine Hermeneutik, NTD Ergänzungsreihe 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979). In preliminary and partial form, Stuhlmacher's contribution is accessible in English: Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Toward a Hermeneutic of Consent, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

11. Stuhlmacher, Verstehen, p. 206.

12. Ibid., pp. 219-220.

13. For this terminology, Stuhlmacher draws on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, to whom Paul Ricoeur, quoted above, is also indebted.

14. Gerhard Ebeling, "The Significance of the Critical-Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism" in Word and Faith, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), pp. 17-61.

15. Stuhlmacher, Verstehen, pp. 220-221.

16. Ibid., pp. 222-224.

17. Ibid., pp. 225-247. See also P. Stuhlmacher and Helmut Class, Das Evangelium von der Versöhnung in Christus (Stuttgart: Calver Verlag, 1979) and P. Stuhlmacher, Versöhnung, Gesetz und Gerechtigkeit (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981). For an English statement, see Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Gospel of Reconciliation in Christ--Basic Features and Issues of a Biblical Theology of the New Testament," trans. George Edwards, HBT 1 (1979), 161-190.

18. Edgar Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

19. Ibid., pp. 63-67.

20. Ibid., pp. 67-72. I have represented these objections a bit more sharply than Krentz did; I have also omitted his several counter-objections to the objections.

21. Ibid., p. 72. This assessment of biblical criticism may call to mind James Smart's probing analysis of The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church (Westminster, 1970). Smart's diagnosis attributed the distance between the laity and the educated clergy to historical criticism. He put the blame for the problem on the church's theological leadership called it to take more seriously the education of the laity in the critical understanding of the Bible.

The critiques of the seventies (with Wink onward) go deeper and call for a fundamental reassessment in the method itself. Some of this critique comes from within and may be seen as the historical-critical method's own self-correcting contribution. But some of the critique comes from outside its structures, posing complementing and even competing considerations (see part II of this essay).

22. I prefer this phrase to Hans Frei's "history-like narrative," though some parts of biblical literature (the early chapters of Genesis and certainly Jesus' parables) might be better described as "history-like narrative," The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 10 and passim. To use the phrase "history-like narrative" for the entire biblical story is hardly appropriate. It selects our modern (rationalist?) definition(s) of history at the expense of excluding ancient views of history from the term history. The terms history and historical method should be freed from narrow definition and be allowed to describe and handle what the biblical narrative contains. In this I am in agreement with Martin Hengel's proposal, op. cit. Further, the phrase, "narrative-borne history," applies well to Frei's description of what the narrative is like. Frei's rather unclear description of his thesis (p.13) may be stated in two points: the biblical accounts are a "narrative rendering of the events constituting them" and this narrative makes sense [historically, I think he means] by employing "at least partially,...the device of chronological sequence." My position would argue that this device is inherent to the content, arising from the nature of the biblical revelation in history.

23. Compare Christian Hartlich, "Is Historical Criticism out of Date?" in Conflicting Ways of Interpreting the Bible, ed. by Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (New York: The Seabury Press and Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980), pp. 3-8. Hartlich says of the interpretation of the miracle-story (Mk. 6:45-52), to which the forum of essays is devoted, that the purpose of this story and other miracle-stories is to summon the readers to belief. Exegesis has shown that these stories in their circulation and use have been "molded and shaped according to the particular literary intention of the person [or community] handling it." Hence, Hartlich says,

Anyone, therefore, who treats the apparently historical statements of the miracle-stories in the gospels as assertions of fact is taking them out of the functional context that exegesis shows them to have and exposes them to the rigour of the modern concept of objective fact, something that is the product of the scientific outlook of the post-medieval world. This misinterpretation surrenders these statements to a process of criticism from which they are bound to emerge the losers (pp. 7-8).

24. Willard M. Swartley, Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1983), pp. 222-23.

25. James Barr, The Scope and Authority of the Bible (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), pp. 50-52.

26. Barr, p. 30.

27. So Parvey and Kroeger; see Swartley, pp. 172-173, 319, n. 103.

28. Swartley, pp. 222-23.

29. Swartley, pp. 186-199, 218, 232-33.

30. See note 14 above.

31. I find Barr's statement too narrowly conceived here also: "the true legitimation of historical and critical reading lies in the relation between scripture, tradition and the church" (Scope, p. 50).

32. Swartley, pp. 215-228. I grant that more must be done to spell out the implications of this method.
33. David L. Bartlett, "Biblical Scholarship Today: A Diversity of New Approaches," The Christian Century (Oct. 28, 1981), 1090-1093.
34. I refer to Smart's book cited above, note 21.
35. Minear, "Symposium on Biblical Criticism," Theology Today 33 (Jan 1977), 354.
36. See also Minear's more recent article, "The Bible's Authority in the Congregation," Theology Today 38 (Oct 1981), 350-356.
37. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970.
38. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974.
39. Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) and Canon As Authority (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).
40. "The Bible as Canon," The Christian Century, (Dec. 2, 1981), 1252.
41. A recent book by Paul D. Hanson addresses directly how the diversity of Scripture can be an enriching resource for the church: The Diversity of Scripture: A Theological Interpretation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).
42. Ibid., pp. 1252-1253.
43. Scope., p. 111.
44. Wink's Bible study of Mark 2:1-12 (Transformation, pp. 54-60), while helpful in a personalistic way, overlooks the societal structural components of the story, e.g., Jesus' clash with the religion of his time. Nor does his applicational use of the story reflect the insights derived from his own historical-critical study of the story. The gap between the scholarly work and the application illustrates need for more work on perhaps still another model of reflection upon the text.
45. In Sin, Salvation and the Spirit, ed. by D. Durksen (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1979), pp. 21-39.
46. Ibid., p. 28.
47. Ibid., pp. 29-30. She sets this point in contrast to the efforts to show how the Bible reveals timeless truths or transmits historically accurate records (p. 31). But this contrast is unfortunate because elements of these two concerns are present within the pastorally oriented biblical literature. Nor do I fully agree with a later emphasis in her article which gives the impression that we pick and choose from the text what best meets our needs (p. 34).
48. Ibid., pp. 35-36.
49. George T. Montague. "Hermeneutics and the Teaching of Scripture," CBQ 41 (Jan 1979), 9.
50. Here Montague cites a Protestant writer, David Lochhead; the quotation appears in my Afterword.
51. Ibid., pp. 13-16. This method merits serious study and may be fruitfully compared with the twelve step method I propose in Slavery, Sabbath, pp. 225-27. Another helpful resource for constructing a method appropriate to this pastoral-teacher use of Scripture is the article, "The Tradition as a Resource in Theological Reflection--Scripture and the Minister" by Eugene C. Ulrich and William G. Thompson in Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry, ed. by James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 31-52.
52. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).
53. Paul Achtemeier has written a helpful introduction to this hermeneutical approach: An Introduction to the New Hermeneutics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969).

54. For an excellent survey and analysis of this emphasis, see Anthony C. Thiselton, The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), ch. 12, pp. 327-356, and ch. 5, pp. 115-139.

55. Ted Boomershine and Edgar McKnight are currently working on manuscripts on reader/hearer oriented criticism. Werner H. Kelber's recent study, The Oral and Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), explores the relationship between orality and textuality in fresh ways. I do not, however, find his thesis convincing: that textuality was an act of "disorientation" and "reorientation," employing text-writing as a weapon to conquer oral contributions, especially from early Christian prophetism (pp. 100ff.).

56. The Theology of St. Luke, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper and Row, 1960). [Germ. orig.: Die Mitte der Zeit].

57. Mark the Evangelist, Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel, trans. James Boyce et.al. (Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1969). [Germ. orig.: Der Evangelist Markus].

58. Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, trans. Percy Scott (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963). [Germ. orig.: Überlieferung und Auslegung im Matthäusevangelium].

59. Norman R. Petersen, Literary Criticism for the New Testament Critics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

60. Joanna Dewey, Markan Public Debate: Literary Technique, Concentric Structure and Theology in Mark 2:1-3:6 (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1980), p. 11. The quotation comes from James Muilenberg in his 1968 SBL presidential address, "Form Criticism and Beyond," JBL 88(1969), 7.

61. Dewey, p. 12.

62. Ibid., pp. 31-37.

63. Jan Lambrecht, Die Redaktion der Markus-Apokalypse: Literarische Analyse und Strukturuntersuchung. AnBib 28 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967).

64. Frank Kermode's study of Mark's Gospel also demonstrates this approach, but with more dependence on structuralist assumptions: The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). See Gerald Graff's critical, even scathing review in The New Republic, June 9, 1979, 27-32.

65. I call attention here to the significant volume by Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, Jesus von Nazareth--Hoffnung der Armen (Stuttgart et al.: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1978).

66. So Lochhead, p. 79 and also Rudolf Bultmann, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" in Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann, trans. Schubert M. Ogden (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing, 1960), pp. 289-96. Bultmann though redefines the word prejudice to preunderstanding and focuses the matter too narrowly on the religious dimension.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CANON

John H. Yoder

The "authority of the canon" is a phrase that could quite properly have a number of different meanings. Very often we use the term "canon" broadly to refer to Scripture itself or to the function of Scripture as norm in the church, i.e., to the authority of Scripture. A discussion of the authority of Scripture as norm within the church would involve numerous classical debates. The narrowest meaning of "canon" designates a set of books which in the course of church history it was agreed should be considered sacred writings. This process of selection was a very long and contested search, with different geographic regions and different periods of church history coming to different conclusions. Differences continue today as to the relative authority of some of the texts in the list, or as to the status of the so-called Old Testament Apocrypha. We would need to question by what authority those lists were compiled and what authority they have for us.

Once we have located the broadest and the narrowest possible meanings of the authority of the canon, this leaves more challenging and accessible, although also more complicated, questions: what does it mean for the functioning of Scripture as authority in the church (canon in the first sense) that the kind of sacred Scripture around which Christians gather is not a single document but a collection of diverse documents (canon in the narrow sense)? What does it mean that the Christian community, in the course of several centuries, settled upon a finite body of writings which they distinguished from other writings as being peculiarly "Scripture?"

THE BACKGROUND OF THE MODERN DEBATE

Discussion of these questions cannot be picked up from scratch in the present; they are products of a long history beginning in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. I therefore must reach back to describe the background which alone explains the vigor (and the inconclusiveness) of the recent debate. The tenseness of the discussion and the terminology and

assumptions with which it is carried forward regularly presuppose the definitions provided for us by what I shall call the High Protestant Scholastic (hereafter HPS) view in Western intellectual history. We must either try to work our way back to "scratch" or discuss head-on with that tradition in the awareness that those who reject it are just as much its products as those who want to affirm it.

What do I mean by the HPS view? First of all this label recognizes a certain intellectual history, most specifically the seventeenth century development of Protestant scholasticism. The Protestant scholastics were working in the state universities of countries which had been made Protestant by the sixteenth century. They were no longer fighting a life-and-death battle for the Reformation as a change in theology and institutions; they were developing, with a view to consistency and thoroughness, the implications and assumptions of the sixteenth century Reformation, elaborating what had been acquired and needed to be defended against new threats. The new threats were not simply new forms of the old debate with Roman Catholicism; they were also the beginnings of the encounter with Enlightenment, namely, with the glorification of natural human reason and the capacity of critical doubt to test everything, relativizing all arguments from authority except the appeal to reason itself. In the face of the double challenge of Rome and reason, HPS orthodoxy worked through to a total system the claim that Scripture is the foundation of the church. It was done in a way which deepened and radicalized some reformation emphases but abandoned the variety, the liveliness, and the sense of flux which had been characteristic of the middle third of the sixteenth century.

The content of the HPS view centered in the claim that biblical literature is unique in every important way. It was written through a kind of process which is different from all other writing, so that it has the quality of being inspired as no other documents do. Its content is therefore vouchsafed to be of revelatory authority, not because of what it is about, who wrote it, or when it was written, but because of the unique event of its being produced as inspired literature.

This inspired quality is reflected in the fact that its language is unique, not to be measured even by the grammar and spelling rules of other language. This was reinforced for the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries by the fact that the Greek of the New Testament did not follow the rules of the classical Attic Greek being taught in universities. It was reinforced by the fact that biblical Hebrew was (as far as Christians were concerned) a dead language, existing only for those who learned it as the language of Scripture.

The HPS view in all its consistency and solidity does not make sense standing alone. It could not have grown directly out of the Bible; it was developed in response to the High Tridentine Catholic (hereafter HTC) vision, itself a response to the critique of the Protestant reformers. Only with the Reformation Council of Trent (1545-63) was Catholicism in the anti-Protestant sense defined. Pushed into a corner by early Protestant appeals to the Bible as the Word of God, the HTC doctrine affirmed that there are two relatively independent channels of divine revelation. One was written in Holy Scripture in the early centuries and recognized as such by the church which had produced it. The other is the parallel channel carrying information not yet written (or written in texts not recognized as Holy Scripture) from which at any later time the teaching church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, may draw to define further doctrines. It does so with the same revelatory authority with which it initially had produced and accredited the writings within the New Testament canon. The Tridentine defense did not claim ongoing fresh revelation but only progress in the definition of what had been revealed once for all. It is obvious that this was a defensive response to the polemics of the early Protestant Reformation, but it is important that the response took this form.

In order for the HPS position to make sense fully we must add three more elements. First, the fixation of the canon must itself be seen as having happened under the special governance and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Obviously the status of Scripture cannot apply to all literature, or to all religious literature, or even to all early Christian literature. That status must be recognized by some sort of process of discrimination which had to happen at some time in the history of the early church. Second, in order for the revelational authority of those texts to have the status of Scripture in the high sense, the process whereby those particular texts were identified as having the status of Scripture must itself also have the status of a revelatory event. This

affirmation that the selection process is revelatory was not tied to any very detailed discussion of the actual chronological history of how the canonical lists came to be established, since the necessity to affirm it was derived from the prior doctrine of Scripture rather than arising out of a history itself. There also had to be, as a third element, the doctrine of the providential preservation of the Scriptural texts. It would not have been enough for the texts to have been written under unique inspiration, and it would not have been enough for them to have been selected as authoritative, if they had not also been preserved through the vicissitudes of history from being lost or corrupted. We can discuss theoretically whether the high doctrine of Scripture could work without one or the other of these characteristics, but in its wholeness and roundedness it is most fitting that all of these elements should be present. Not on the same level as the other three points but necessarily interlaced with them was the assumption that the propositional content of all the canonical writings is in such a way timelessly true and coherent that it is fitting to lift all the significant statements out of their specific setting, whether in narrative, poetry, or epistle, and to reorganize them according to modern principles of coherence.

In response to the HTC interpretation, it had to be said at the same time that the message of Scripture is perspicuous, i.e., clear and self-interpreting, and that its content is the equivalent of those documents in which Protestants had reformulated brief confessional documents relating to the controversies of the time and much more complete compendia of dogmatic theology. While debatable in detail, these dogmatic compendia are substantially equivalent to Scripture itself and share indirectly in its authority.

The difference between the dogmatic summary and the canon is important for our present purposes. The compendium is more usable, more orderly, because the essential doctrinal information about God, man, and salvation was abstracted out of the narratives, epistles, and other occasional writings in which it had been embedded.

"Hermeneutics" was the name given to the process of lifting the timeless truths from the occasional and unimportant context, dehistoricizing and systematizing them. This was the background assumed when liberals

and conservatives agreed about what the Bible says but differed about whether to believe it.

In sum: the HPS view held not only that the texts within the canonical New Testament have authority, but that the process of canonization was revelatory, and that the coherence of all of the texts recognized as canonical is the coherence of one logical set of propositions in no way contradictory to another. These two logical prerequisites were demanded by the culture of the Protestant Scholastic movement. Neither is justified by the text of the Bible itself. Neither is demanded by a Protestant commitment to use the Scriptures as we have them as the criteria for the renewal of the church and the source of its language of proclamation. They make the entire edifice more vulnerable.

The Alternative

Within the past century and a half we have observed the development of the thorough critical questioning of the HPS view. This questioning, however, did not take the form of starting over from some new point of departure. It was rather directly dependent on what it criticized, negating what the HPS view affirmed. For present purposes I will call it the High Modern (hereafter HM) view. The term "modern" should be taken loosely, because this view is not as original as it is held to be by some who come to it only recently, or by others who reject it. It also tends to be assumed in this connection that the latter is better, that modernity is itself a criterion of truth, and that the process of the accumulation of knowledge in the ongoing institutional and intellectual life of the West, as carried by the guild of scholars, is basically unilinear and is moving forward, not backward. I have taken the liberty of maintaining the adjective "high" as a pointer to the confidence with which these claims are made, as well as to the conviction of those who make them that they are important.

For the advocates of this view, its methods of literary and historical criticism have taken over the field, even though some rough edges and internal debates remain. Its criticism ranges far more broadly, but its negative impact on the concept of canon is evident. It did not take historical scholarship long to demonstrate that the lists of accepted Scriptures were compiled late, that for many centuries they were contested, and that they were

initially established on the basis of debatable factual judgments, such as the (perennial sample) assumption that the epistle to the Hebrews belongs in the New Testament because the apostle Paul wrote it. Beyond this the notion of a peculiarly miraculous process of writing was progressively undermined by the observation that the three so-called synoptic Gospels have a large amount of common content and that it is possible to look at Matthew or Luke as probably derivative from Mark for a common base of content. Without being able in any sense to prove how Matthew wrote his text, it can be made to seem humanly probable that the materials common to more than one Gospel could be accounted for in terms of one author's text (or, in more refined hypotheses, the tradition from which the other author's text was also derived). Obviously, historical science demolished the notions of a special Holy Spirit language and reserved no space for the miraculous preservation of the documents.

I have said that some uses of the perspectives of HM critical scholarship have remained logically and emotionally subservient to the HPS view while attempting to critique it. The critic holding to the HM form assumes that it is indispensable to attack the conservatism which went before, rather than seeing that view as itself only one of many. Second, the critic assumes that critical observations by their very nature have the last word (i.e., the reference to "modern" as a truth category). Neither of these assumptions would need to hold, but it makes a great difference whether we question the HM confidence by seeking after all to be pre-critical or move beyond it by taking a post-critical stance.

Another Way?

Thus far we have been laying out the terrain of the debate with each stage demolishing the one that went before:

- a) Simple early Reformation biblicism;
- b) HTC with two sources;
- c) HPS with one miraculous source;
- d) HM skepticism.

Must the debate continue in such a polarized mode and mood? There might be alternatives. First let us return to the intellectual history, which did not stop where we left it with the birth of the HM view.

We may identify one set of views which can best be called post-modern. They move beyond the view

which above was designated as modern, not so much by arguing with it as by beginning the debate again at a different point. One set of these views sprang up in European Protestantism in the 1920's, under the headings, "theology of crisis" and "theology of the Word." They moved in different directions under the leadership of the various major minds of the period (Barth, Bultmann, Brunner,. . .) but all had in common a claim that it is somehow possible to read and to preach from the Bible, in some sort of spiritual continuity with the Protestant Reformation, yet without getting caught on either side of the debate between the HPS and the HM Protestant forms. This they did by finding new ways to talk about revelation without tying it to the status of the book. The canon itself was not a very important problem.

The other major post-modern view, picking up in some details from the theologies of the Word but moving well beyond, came in the movement called "Biblical Realism" just before World War II. This is a current of thought whose history has not been written. It uses the tools of critical scholarship in order to defend the thought of the Bible and its authentic expression within its own world view against the modernization of all the HPS and the HTC views, but also against the HM; it sees all of them as preoccupied with issues which are not those to which the original writers of Scripture were addressing themselves. It is held that it should be possible to rediscover the initial agenda of the writers of Scripture and to state in their own terms what they meant to say, without being the captives of later debates and of the distortion which those later debates have forced upon the texts. Sometimes (Tremontant, Cherbonnier) it was claimed by the Biblical Realists that there is one normative biblical world view. Sometimes (Boman) it was held that the Hebrew language, as distinguished from Greek and Latin, was especially compatible with a different perception of reality. Sometimes (Minear) a distinctive "way of seeing" was affirmed without making other more ambitious (and more debatable) claims. Others (O. Piper) contented themselves with the argument that elements of the Bible's view of reality (e.g., the reality of evil) must not be sifted out by modernity.

Independent of all the above, older than some of it but less impressive in its intellectual formulation, is the entire sweep of non-academic

biblical interpretation nurtured in pietism and evangelicalism over the centuries. When the adjective "biblical" was put in the name of Bethany Biblical Institute of Chicago or Garrett Biblical Institute of Evanston, it did not imply the use of a scholarly formulation but rather expressed the confidence that if students spent more of their time studying the text of the Bible itself than other theological subjects, they could hardly go wrong. Other levels of the theological enterprise were not rejected, but a conviction that for both personal piety and pastoral priority it was the book itself that counted first and could probably defend itself against misinterpretation. When the same adjective was claimed by The Biblical Seminary in New York, a similar point was being made in a more sophisticated way. Here the point was that proper attention (usually in English) to the present form of the biblical writings would avoid stumbling over the debates of dogmatic and critical nature which had made academic study of the Scriptures seem sterile. This attention sought to be inductive, to avoid importing into the interpretation of the text either traditional or subjective biases and let the text itself tell us how to read it. In more than one way, the adjective "biblical" came to mean the negation of some of the standard older ways of reading the text. The interest of this approach was to heighten the immediate ability of the text to speak to the church, without stumbling over the difficulties which had been provoked by earlier methodological assumptions.

Still a different kind of overtone arises in those contexts where the appeal to the Bible is judgmental. When Jim Wallis entitled a book Agenda for Biblical People, he did not mean people who think in first century categories, or people who read the Bible text instead of some other book, or who read it inductively instead of with some other method. He meant people who make the Bible the rule of their faith and practice rather than denying it a hold upon their loyalty. This element of normative commitment brings into the picture another whole set of historical causes and controversies. It sees the Bible as not only indicative but also as imperative.

REFOCUSING THE ISSUE

Another affirmative position, also post-modern or neo-classical, is (I suggest) dictated by the nature

of the data. It begins with the observation that if it was unavoidable that there should be within the Bible a history of redaction moving on beyond the oldest "unimpeachably historic accounts," then we must find some way to affirm that that redaction process is not treasonous, and that what it did to the tradition must be recognized as somehow also true. The earliest Christians had a much wider pool than we do of authentic memories of the words of Jesus. We should not let our imagination be dominated too soon by our knowledge that later generations developed a still wider pool of traditions, filled partly with inauthentic or invented memories. Rather, there were real memories, not all of which were passed on until they could be written down. This process of selection, by its very nature, would have favored those memories which mattered most, thus initiating a process of redactional selection which we have no reason to second-guess.

By definition, historians retell a story for their own age. A very imaginative historian may be conscious of the distance between the first generation and his or her own. Such an awareness of distance may be consciously reflected in the story-telling. Most first-generation narrators or reporters do not have this degree of technical sophistication. They will properly have retold the story in the context of their own generation, in order that its impact upon their own listeners in the year 60 or in the year 80 or in the year 95 could be as nearly as possible the dynamic equivalent of the impact of the original stories on the first beholders. That trans-generational translation makes the message less literally "historical" in the technical critical sense but makes it more validly a part of the growing history of the Christian community, as long as the person doing the story-telling is a valid witness and is recounting the story subject to the observation and possible correction of his or her peers. Thus is it not necessarily distortion when in Matthew's Gospel precision is added to Jesus' words about divorce; it may be organic extrapolation, speaking with maximum fidelity to a more precisely defined case.

If we read the canonical texts as guidance for the life of the church and as reminders of the full meaning of Jesus, we may then affirm that this redactional process is theologically indispensable, not merely legitimate or excusable. High orthodox theology used the word "inspiration" for this

legitimacy, but we need not take that systematic detour. Without it we can affirm that the authentic memory of the community, as preserved by that community's accredited elders, partakes of the normal authority of any human group's care for its path through time. As the widely-respected New Testament scholar John Knox recently explicated in greater detail, the memory is the reality it remembers. In no other way can past reality exist than as remembered.

As memory recounted orally is recorded on papyrus, as memory translated into terms relevant to the year 65 gives place to translations for the year 95, as more memories transmitted along more paths ramify into a host of differing traditions, the communities which create and use them will begin to become aware of the limits of tolerable variations. Some texts will be recognized as nearer to the origins than others. This matters because faith in Jesus Christ includes by its very nature a verifiable (and therefore also falsifiable) historical reference and a truth-claim, such that the several confessors of that faith call one another to faithfulness by appealing to that common origin.

The classic debate between orthodox Protestantism and Tridentine Catholicism led us astray at this point. The Protestants seemed to be claiming that the authority of these Scriptures depends upon the unique miracle of inspiration whereby they came into being and which gives them timeless status above the church. That argument was circular on two counts; it did not itself explain the criteria of canonization and the basis for the claim to inspired authority lay within the texts themselves. Catholicism served us no better by answering that the texts only have the authority which the Church gave them. This is not quite true either because the Church which confirmed the authority of the texts in the course of the early centuries was not the same as the first-century church which wrote them, nor as the Roman Catholic hierarchy presenting this argument in the seventeenth century. The alternative, simply stated long ago by Oscar Cullmann, is much more apt. The development of a selection of writings recognized by churches as authoritative constitutes itself the final proof, delivered by the church itself, that the church does not claim final authority but rather recognizes that it stands under a rule derived from the apostolic age. This "standing under a rule" is not a statement about

the event of inspiration or the uniqueness of the authorship of certain texts. It is a statement about the accountability of the Christian community as a movement within history, whose claim to be faithful to historical origins in the midst of historical change obliges it to identify the criteria of that accountability. The affirmation of accountability is not dependent upon one particular definition of how the Scriptures came to be written or selected.

We have come upon a second level of meaning of canonical authority. If the Christian faith were based like Christian Science on one body of revelatory literature, or on a miraculous Koran, or on a timeless poem as in the Hindu sacred texts, or on writings claiming intrinsic authority of some other kind, it might not matter who the authors were, or whether the religious experiences they recount have any linkage with particular times and places. It is the peculiarity of biblical faith that it is rooted in events, especially the events from the Exodus to Pentecost. But in a derivative way it is rooted also in the ongoing story of the apostolic church and (in a still more derivative way, but really) in the ongoing story since then. The category of story and the claim of that story to be rooted in real people and places distinguishes Christian faith from most other religions before and since. That faith is therefore documented not primarily in visions or in speculative theories about divine reality, but in narratives and pastoral letters which claim to be testimonies to the norming process within an ongoing community. That is how they claim to have been written and that is how we should best take them. Already within the New Testament appeal was made to the founding events. If we are to be continuing the same movement, it will happen not by debating the metaphysical status of the documents but by extending in a compatible way the process of conforming to the foundational events. It made more difference than one first perceives that what is recognized by the churches as norming document is not a systematic text, not a catechism, and of course not a Summa, but a scattered series of documents emerging from the ongoing struggles of a community.

From the more traditional point of view it is very embarrassing for conservatives and a source of glee for the more critical that differences can be found between the accent of one text and that of another. Paul and James do not have the same accents

concerning the relation of faith to works: the Peter of Acts and the Paul of Colossians do not have exactly the same Christology with reference to what later became the doctrine of the preexistence of the Son. Various Gospel writers have different emphases with regard not only to chronology but also to larger questions of epistemology or the meaning of Jewishness. It is not clear to me why some contemporary scholars with a more critical orientation show what I have just called glee in the way they write about the differences. It is only if one assumes that the base line would have to be one systematically coherent doctrinal framework, unchanging in all places in the early church and for all times, that the observation that Luke and Paul have different accents would have any critical impact. If one perceives and conceives of Scriptures as documenting the life and the norming process of a particular community, then it would be preposterous to assume that the documentation arising from that process would be one of total propositional coherence. All of the texts show the process of taking the Jesus of history as norm, the Jesus of real history (that is, what really happened), as mediated by real history (that is, by the real traditioning process of the ongoing church), rather than the "Jesus of history" of modern skeptical historiography. We can learn much from modern skeptical historiography, but the one thing it is not equipped to resurrect for us is the real history. Its procedures of systematically doubting the sources can sometimes usefully decrease the degree of immediacy which we can attribute to certain texts, but they can never replace the texts with something more certain. Skeptical historiography will therefore always be an ancillary discipline.

Our need for a text to give guidance to the church interlocks consistently with the way in which we should read the same texts. If we accepted the classical HPS vision, this unity would not obtain. The reason for needing the text would be the miracle of the event of inspired writing, which itself does not say anything specific about how the text is to be taken.

In the context proposed here, on the other hand, the way we see the writers of the New Testament operating, the way we see the church of the early centuries operating in fixing upon a list of texts, the way we see reformers operating through the centuries in appealing to the texts, and the way we in

our time go about determining what the text says for us are all a part of the very same dynamic. When we ask how Christ is the Lord of the canon, this does not mean, as it might for one kind of Lutheranism, simply that the "material principle" of justification by faith is the key to the consistency of Scripture. The claim is far more substantial than that, historically more relative but also therefore more genuine. It is that the writers of the New Testament text are best understood when we perceive them to be aiding their readers to be more faithful to the meaning of Jesus for their time. If there are debates about how to take New Testament texts, that interpretation in which authentic recourse to the memory of the Lord is most evident will make the most sense. Interpretations which would prescribe a timelessly binding moral social order without reference to the in-breaking of the messianic age, or to the inter-cultural missionary dynamics of the church (such as the apostolic instructions about the place of women) will be less credible. Interpretations purporting to find some timelessly normative scheme of salvation experience, or of divine metaphysics, in detachment from the norming work of Jesus in the missionary church will also be less credible, whereas in the earlier HPS tradition their very timelessness would have been considered an argument in their favor.

In much of the touchiness of the recent debates about scriptural authority one sees at work a need which seems to be as much psychological as logical, namely the desire to have one's statement of the nature and power of Scripture be itself as sure and as safe as God. When observing the vigor with which this concern for authority is argued, one can hardly avoid the impression that the certainty which the theologian desires is intended to apply to the theologian's own system of answers and explanations as well as to God's own claims. It is this high vision of the security of one's own system then which produces the backlash of scholarly doubt and secular questioning.

Keeping the Edges Open

This view further means that we should not simply accept but also consciously and responsibly maintain the vulnerability of all our interpretations to ongoing historical hermeneutics. Just as the reading of Jesus by scholars in 1950 has since undergone clarification of historical connections and meanings due to the contributions of archaeology, linguistics, and several

generations of literary criticism, so we might well trust that the clearest consensus of today will again stand to be changed in the future, as long as the change comes not from faddism or forgetting but from increasing historical responsibility. There are no "necessary truths of reason" which we should attempt to shelter; any truth which is not vulnerable to historical falsification is not really incarnational but only analytical.

Historians of early Christianity are already giving more attention to the Didache than to 2 Peter and Jude. This is perhaps because of a subjective judgment about the interest or the religious quality of materials, but is it not at the same time implicitly a statement about apostolicity? If someone were to find in some Near Eastern sands a well-preserved document demonstrably written by an identifiable member of the Twelve, or for that matter by Luke or the author of Hebrews, we would have to receive it with great seriousness. We would have difficulty constructing a doctrine of the inspiration, transmission, and protection of Scripture texts which would apply less to this new text than to some of the original twenty-seven.

But what if this new text should say something we don't want to believe? Would we still have to take it seriously? I suggest that we would have to take it still more seriously. The new text would do us the least good if it were a simple repetition of what we already have in other forms. If it added significantly to our knowledge of the life and witness of the early church, in such a way as to challenge our present understandings and obedience, that would be more of the same function which the first twenty-seven books have already been discharging.

The problem would be somewhat more delicate if it could be demonstrated that the new understandings in this new apostolic writing were in some direct sense contradictory to the rest of the canon. Since, however, the present canon already has considerable room for a variety of formulations which can be taken as contradiction but which careful hermeneutics seeks to interpret as parts of a larger whole, there would be nothing fundamentally problematic about adding a few more apparent contradictions. We would simply know more about the life of the New Testament community in its variety; that could not possibly have a negative impact upon our concern to be the faithful

successor of that community as a whole, as followers with them of Jesus.

Affirming the Particular

We might as well face the fact that the canonical principle makes quasi-permanent the effects of what might be seen as a kind of hazard. There were certainly other Christian witnesses stating their message in ways slightly or significantly different from the message outlines which we have in the book of Acts, from which C. H. Dodd lifted the obvious skeleton outline which he called the apostolic kerygma. We might even guess how those other skeleton outlines might have differed from the one preserved in Acts. But they were not preserved. The sermons of Acts were preserved (or the message was remembered of which the sermons in Acts are the restatement) because they became the conceptual nucleus of communities which survived and left us records. Many other communities with other messages may well have survived for a time but without keeping records, or their records may have been kept but later destroyed. If they had been preserved, they presumably would have informational value or even some kind of authority for us. What we have is all we have.

We are accustomed to being told that, over against a timeless platonic message of truths unrelated to time and place, we should rejoice that God chose to be revealed through the particular. The incarnation does not mean that humankind in general, or human nature in general, or human history in general was stamped with God's approval or transformed by God's indwelling, but rather that a particular story, the words and work of a particular man, is the key to the very nature of God. That particularity is even more scandalous if we reckon deeply with the fact that the historicity of the incarnation committed God to the particularity of an ongoing history. God entrusted the incarnational disclosure not only to a first generation of witnesses of the man Jesus, but also to the chain of specific bodies of tradition-bearing, fallible people who through the centuries would unfold and distort the message. It is not a regrettable mistake of church strategy contrary to the divine plan when we find ourselves needing to deal with the unfinished quality of the definition of the Christian story.

Is There Still Authority?

One way to finish the story, or at least to deal with its unfinished quality, is to affirm a carte blanche given to the ongoing community and its particular structures. The assumption is that since God set a motion going, the conclusions to which it comes must be affirmed or approved. This can be done institutionally with Roman Catholicism or culturally and philosophically with Hegel; the notion is the same. History is its own god or is the coming-to-consciousness of the indwelling Spirit. This idea is not useful, not only because one does not have to be Catholic, but because it does not explain why it is the particularity of Roman Catholicism rather than the particularity of Russian Orthodox Greek Catholicism which should claim the right to fill in the blanks on the check. The notion of the ongoing authority and the claimed univocality of revelatory history defeats itself by the divergences it creates.

It is probably more important for us to recognize that the alternative which classic Protestantism placed over against Catholic particularity is not intrinsically more trustworthy or faithful. The HPS assumed for contrast a timeless theological system. Identical in meaning with the words of Scripture (although organized according to other principles) and claiming the authority of revealedness even though needing continuing interpretation, it claimed to avoid the danger of particularity by its timeless identity with the Bible and by the confidence that the same Holy Spirit would make it say the same thing to every true believer. This view as well is inadequate, not only because we can see through it philosophically, or because the biblical text itself is not put together that way, but because like the Catholic alternative, it refutes itself by the very fact of the plurality of interpretations which lay claim to the same perspicuous certainty.

That HTC/HPS polarity defines the space within which the more historical Anabaptist or restitutionist view will proceed. There must be an ongoing history--there must be a plurality of ongoing histories--yet the bearers of these separate stories know themselves accountable to the common starting point. Thereby in each new circumstance they are responsible to return together to the bar of Scripture, not because they could have avoided moving on from Scripture nor because Scripture is itself a final unity or intrinsically perspicuous, but because

Scripture records the unique beginning of their diversity-in-unity and thereby will continue to yield the models for the processing of their diversity and to define the limits of variation which that unity can tolerate.

We should loop back to where the debate began. The challenge with which we need to deal is not whether or not the Scripture is to be operative in the churches. There are no churches in which Scripture does not function in some way. The question is whether the operation of Scripture within the church is most adequately described in HPS terms or in some other terms.

The present outline proposes that by having exposed the weaknesses of the HPS system, we have achieved something constructive. We proceed from another perspective. In the awareness of the past power and present weakness of the HPS view, this outline begins again in a more contemporary way, which might be called an historical modulation of the sociology of knowledge. Instead of asking whether the HPS view is right or wrong, we ask: what would we come up with if we were to ask what it means for any human movement, deriving its identity from a limited set of foundational events, to seek to be faithful to the meaning of those events within the flux of historical (which means changing) existence?

The Battle for the Bible (1976) by Harold Lindsell, has resurrected an old debate. Do we believe the Bible because we believe the Bible, i.e., because it says itself that it is true, or do we believe the Bible because a reasonable case can be made for believing it? The latter may be argued either by proving that it is not inaccurate in matters of archaeology or human nature or history, or by arguing more philosophically that we need a revelatory base to make sense out of life and that the Bible is such a text. An article in the Reformed Journal (May, 1980, 19-23) restates the other position against Harold Lindsell, thus showing the two sides of a debate which in an earlier period separated Cornelius Van Til from Gordon Clark (or, in a much broader sense, Emil Brunner from Karl Barth).

A more liberal theology, linked with a more skeptical literary criticism, does not escape the same kinds of questions. Why should one bother to go to great lengths to ask historical critical questions of a text, unless it has some authority for us and over us? If it has some kind of authority, then does that

authority lie in the historical Jesus behind it, whom we might find some day more clearly than he is yet visible? Or does it lie in some existential message to be distilled out of the text because critical studies help us to shuck off the hull? Or is the contribution of critical studies rather to make us hopeless about ever finding truth that way, so that we are then more ready to trust an analysis based on something other than the texts (the argument once used by Paul Tillich)?

My suggestion is that if we had taken more seriously the fact that, in the wisdom of God, the churches of the early centuries chose to recognize as their norming authority (canon) a list of historical documents (canon in the other sense), we would have been saved from this entire set of dilemmas, whether conservative or liberal. We would have been left in the continuing uncertainty of life within history, the arbitrariness and the particularity of all historical existence, and the arbitrariness and particularity of hermeneutics within history, which is precisely where we ought to be, since that is where God chose to be revealed in all the arbitrariness and particularity of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Jeremiah, Jesus and Pentecost, Luke and Paul, Peter and John.

UNDERSTANDING THE NORMING PROCESS

As distinguished from the skeptical axioms of the quest for the historical Jesus, the new approaches of traditional criticism or redaction criticism may hold a different kind of positive value. Rather than attempting to work backwards from the existing text to a smaller and smaller nucleus of what we can believe may be indubitable, these approaches seek to follow the same path in the other direction. They look for an organic pattern of development or a trajectory whereby an idea followed its own logic and grew in a way that was implied by its earlier stages of growth, until it reached the point where it settled into the text we have. Some of the scholars who use this pattern of analysis link it with skepticism with regard to the nucleus of authentic words, or with relativism regarding the authority of the witnesses, like those which marked the earlier generations of destructive criticism. But these axioms are not indispensable to the "trajectory" approach. To the extent to which we can see how and why the editorial

orientation of Luke or Matthew contributed to a specific adaptation of the inherited witness to a new audience, it enriches rather than weakens the canonical principle to say that Matthean or Lukan adaptation is a part of the Spirit-led revelatory experience and constitutes canonical authority for us. So what we are guided by is not simply the text as it stands but the Spirit-led experience which produced the text, including the Spirit-mandated adaptations of the original message to the later readership for whom the later author was writing.

One way to move on from this recognition of growth within the canon would be to see it as the beginning of the growth of the concept of a teaching authority beyond the Scripture itself, i.e., as a launching pad for the Catholic vision of a permanent authority of the church to go on extending trajectories beyond the canon. This thrust toward prolongation is a necessary challenge. We need to face it rather than to avoid it by retreating to an understanding of canonical materials as timeless in their origin and the mode of their authority.

We need to combine an affirmation of the character of the canonical texts as documents of growth with our understanding of the meaning of the closing of the canon. The simplest modern explanation has been already cited from Oscar Cullmann. He states that it is the apostolic generation who had the right to interpret Jesus, including the ongoing interpretation of the first thirty to fifty years after Pentecost. Only the first generation of eye-witnesses of the resurrection had that right. This criterion sounds clear enough to begin with, yet Luke and the author of Hebrews were not such first-hand witnesses. We need a more refined way of stating what we mean by the first generation of the apostolic witnesses. It should be remembered that the later writings did not keep spinning off in some new direction, nor begin or prolong increasing deviation from the starting point. Rather they provided models for reaching back to the beginnings in order to critique potential dangers discernable in developments which had already taken place.

Our understanding of the evolution of the biblical writings is ill-served by the sequence in which we now find the texts. The New Testament begins with the Gospels, and the Epistles come later. Within the writings of Paul we begin with the most systematic like Romans and end with the most occasional like

Thessalonians. We begin with Paul and end with the general epistles. If we were to understand the actual sequence of redaction it would be in all these ways the other way around. First we would have the work of Paul, including the new formulations of christology which his launching out into the Hellenistic world called forth. Then the Gospels were written, to loop back to the Jesus of the story. The sequence was just the opposite of Harnack's vision of a Jewish Christianity gradually getting more and more Hellenistic until finally it was early Catholicism. Rather, the most historic, most Jewish documents, i.e., the Gospels, were written later, in order to assure that the missionary vitality of the Pauline thrust and the imaginative vitality of the apocalypses would not come unhitched from the historical reality of the Jesus about whom they were talking in free and creative adaptation. Thus every new expression, including the trajectory of Christian reformulation in later redaction, is at the same time a new effort of the author to reach back to Jesus. That is why it is authoritative, not because it has evolved one step farther away from Jesus, but because it has reformulated the appeal to Jesus once more from a new, later perspective and thereby sharpened the claim that Jesus is authority even a decade or a generation later.

One of the liabilities within the HTC/HPS/HM heritage has been the crippling effect of debate about whether the canon has a center of its own. For Luther it was obvious: Christ meant the message of justification by faith. For Tolstoy it was the new ethic of nonresistance. For Harnack it was the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. Yet not all efforts to find a canon within the canon are equally dubious. The remedy for reading one's own definitions and priorities into a text is self-critical distance and the formal search for other alternatives. The alternative to an arbitrary canon within the canon is not to relinquish hope of finding major lines and accents. There are objective instruments of literary analysis which justify solid though modest conclusions about the unity of content which lies behind the collection and reception of a body of texts as Scripture by a community.

Since any body of texts has to have been collected by a given community, it is natural that we should listen to that community for guidance as to what they themselves thought to be the unifying

principle which guided them in making the collection. Yet we should not let that search into the mind of the people who produced for us the canonical lists, or the wider group of people who developed the usage pattern of which the lists are witnesses, make us think that their own thinking about the texts used in their community should necessarily be identical with the content of the texts themselves. What the readers thought the texts said may not be the same as what the texts say they say. This potential discrepancy appears on a very superficial level in the discussion of whether the book of Hebrews belongs in the canon because it was written by Paul. On a deeper level, some differences of emphasis exist between the content of the New Testament Scriptures and the representative theological emphases of the churches of the third century who decided to continue the use of these texts and to discourage the use of others.

There is a solid deeper reason for insisting on the discrepancy between the mind of the church which settled on the canon (meaning the church of the third or fourth centuries and still later) and the question of unity and focus in the text itself. That deeper reason is the very fact with which we began, namely that the historical function of a body of Scripture is not simply to inform or to legitimate. It is also to stand in judgment upon later history as a source of alternative definitions or norms, so that the Scriptures can provide a point of reference which is at the same time outside and inside, distant yet recognized as legitimate, for the ongoing conversation of the historical community with its historical origins. For that purpose then it is by definition desirable to recognize that the canon within the canon should not be assumed to be any of the central definitions of Christian identity which were operative at the time the canonization was solidified.

There is nothing arbitrary or pietistic in saying that the story of Jesus is the canon within the Christian canon. An inner canon can be arbitrary, as in Luther's "was Christum treibet" or with the pietist's Christ. But it can also be a formally responsible statement. We make first of all a general observation about literary form, that in the New Testament we have no general treatise on theological topics, no direct apologetics addressed to outsiders, but rather a series of narratives and a series of letters addressed to insiders. A few of the letters (Hebrews, Revelation) reach beyond the literary form

of the letter, but that makes it all the more significant that they are presented within that outer shell. The rest of the letters are very clearly occasional, written from someone particular (even if some may debate who that was) to someone particular (even though in some cases it is not fully clear where the twelve tribes of the dispersion were, or exactly what territory is Galatia).

It is thus intrinsic to the kind of literature we have in the New Testament to take it as informing us about a narrative. The narrative begins with the Jesus story, which is so important that it is told four times. That story is extended in direct continuity into a very selective account of some strands of the life of the early communities, and then letters are gathered which are, so to speak, candid snapshots out of the life of the community. In their various ways the letters all record that the way the leaders of this community sought to foster its faithfulness was by continually reminding one another of the their past story, of which Jesus and the Hebrew Scriptures were the primary orientation.

Whatever there might be in New Testament literature which in some formal literary sense could be qualified as myth, there is no doubting that the bulk of this material is more clearly historical narrative, and documents with historical memory underlying than it is the kind of myth and poetry which are the proper forms of some bodies of religious tradition. It is equally evident that this literature is very different from speculative philosophy and from systematic theology in its style and priorities. There is clearly little interest in the question, "What does it mean for me?", which is so self-evident for some of our contemporaries. And low priority is assigned to the apologetic agenda which must ask, "How true is this for someone who does not believe it?"

Thus we are not at all arbitrary when we observe that the New Testament itself is already witness to a process of letting a history be judged by its pre-history, deriving the identity of a movement from the memory of the man and the meetings and the meanings the group remembers. If the community in the very first decades produced and preserved literature which contributed to this kind of process, it is quite fitting--and not a change of key--for that community in later years to select from its library those witnesses of the story which were perceived most adequately to serve that purpose. We should not be

surprised that this selecting was done with the tools of the time, such as the contemporary understandings of the authorship of Hebrews. How could it have been otherwise? But the moral and formal adequacy of the process of canon fixation is not dependent on all the details of the reasoning process which those people used as they debated the borders of the canon.

Now we see the point of the HPS testimonies to the idea that the process of canon fixation was itself a unique and final intervention of God, the one act of inspiration which occurred after the writing of the texts. If this view of scriptural authority is to be supported, the assumption is in one sense inevitable, but today it is hardly usable even by the more conservative heirs of that tradition. It is hard to know exactly where and when which canon was settled on with any authority, since debates about some of the fringe books went on until early modern times. More important, there is some kind of flaw in a doctrine of inspiration which can affirm that one specific act of Holy Spirit intervention in the life of the later church is identifiable when there is no inspired text to say that, and when the use one wishes to make of the rigid doctrine of Scripture is to deny the teaching authority of the later church. That was an effort to remove canonization from the relativity of the historical process. Yet as we have seen, the only context for making meaningful the necessity of canon is that very relativity.

If however we face this understanding of the source and the authority of the fixing of the canon, we do need to remain open in principle to further light. The open-ended nature of the story of our recurrent reaching back to Jesus is like Noah's ark; it cannot be closed off from inside.

One of the indices of the HM dependence upon what it is arguing against is the question whether we need to hold that the New Testament documents as we have them are exclusive and authoritative. Both of these adjectives are High Protestant. To say that the present New Testament canon is exclusive would mean an a priori statement about other texts of equal apostolic authority which might turn up in some Egyptian sandpiles, whose witness value we would set aside without even seeing them because they had not circulated in the second century. If what we are thinking about is sober historical accountability within the particularity and the relativity of

history, such an exclusion cannot be stated, since it side-steps historical accountability.

The Old Testament Scriptures already quote from written texts which are not found in the present canon. The New Testament does the same. So did the early church fathers. Later Christian thinkers, even the Reformers and the Anabaptists, felt free to cite as having some kind of historically rooted authority texts which are not in the canon. Thus the notion of canonical status should never have been associated with a claim that only these texts are to be read with profit, or that only they throw light on Jesus. The fact that a canon is present and contributes to the definition of the faithful identity of Christian community is separate both in logic and in actual historical fact from the details of determining which texts belong in that canon. The major Christian bodies have had slightly different canons in the past, and to some extent still do, but they agree in the commitment to be canonically governed.

If any HM interpreter should propose to give less weight to James or Revelation, he or she will be in good company. Should greater value for the Acts of Paul and Thecla or the Gospel According to Thomas be claimed, the case needs to be made, as in the past, within the circular particularity of the claim to better articulate the appeal to the common Christ. The hypothetical freshly discovered authentic writing of Paul to the church in Alexandria would have to make its way just as the Didache has. Since the case for canonical status is a case made within the contingent debatability of historical knowledge, Paul would be willing to take that risk.

In a similar sense the HM challenge uses the High Protestant understanding of "authoritative": i.e., as constituting a mine of unchallenged propositions, from which any deduction drawn according to the rules of logic will also produce a proposition of revelatory authority. The challenge falls flat if we have once backed away from the HPS equation of contemporary dogmatic constructions with the authorities of the texts themselves. Even if the true historical Jesus search came up with indubitable words of Jesus, that would not save us from the continuing temporal flux of transmission and adaptation.

The most creative recent review of the issue of canonical authority as theologically important has been sparked by the writings of James Sanders and Brevard Childs. The present text has intentionally

avoided conversing directly with them, or letting their way of putting the issues predetermine the shape of the discussion. If there were to be more conversation with them, we would find far-reaching agreement on the central substance. Still, my present impression is that we would differ in that, in order to make his point, Childs especially has had to argue that historical, literary critical, and sociological interpretation are quite different from reading the Scriptures as Scriptures, whereas I would expect a greater complementarity among the several disciplinary approaches. Likewise, when Childs says that the last form of the text is to be taken as its canonic form, he seems to be positing this as an axiom, where I would affirm the need to argue it as a thesis.

Perhaps the most fitting images for contrasting the classical options would be a post on one hand and a vine on the other. A post firmly planted in the ground at one place will never move or change. Its orientation is unambivalent and one cannot go beyond it. This would represent the HPS orthodox vision of the authority of canonical Scriptures, roughly equivalent to a closed system of propositional truths, unchanging except for translation into different languages. A vine grows in numerous directions. More than one branch are with equal genuineness the real vine, even though various branches grow in different directions. This could be taken as an image of the Catholic vision of organic progression in many directions without firm restraints. If unhindered, a vine will grow in so many different directions that it will become a thicket, choking itself to the point that it will obstruct the passage and bear less and less fruit.

A vine needs to be pruned. Pruning presupposes that a vine ought to be a vine and not a post or a tree, yet it sets limitations on the ramifications which are legitimate. It distinguishes between branches which ought to survive and branches which need to be cut off. It does so by having some picture of how those branches relate to both the trunk and the root, and to fruit-bearing as well. Thus the pruning process is a way of letting the root stand in judgment on the branches. This, I would suggest, is like the historically realistic Protestant understanding of canon. The fact that there are several branches and not simply a post or a single tree trunk is affirmed. We do not work with the vision of one undifferentiated body of coherent propositional affirmations but with

the affirmation of one coherent organism, all of whose branches are genuinely and authentically derived from and dependent upon the root; all are subject to being judged by the closeness of relationship to the root. The fact that the four Gospels are not identical, or that Luke does not sound just like Paul, is in no sense a refutation of the claim that Scripture is a coherent unit, any more than the fact that a grapevine has one branch running northwest and one southwest keeps it from being a single vine, as long as both branches relate to the root and to the trellis. The real function of the notion of canon then is that it permits realistically the operation of a norming process within pluralism rather than assuming (with modernism) that pluralism is the end of all norms, or (with orthodoxy) that norms are the end of all pluralism.

PART IV
THE BIBLE IN THE CONGREGATION

18

TEACHING THE BIBLE IN THE CONGREGATION

Ross T. Bender

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

2 Timothy 3:16-17

This text I heard frequently as a boy in church and it left an indelible impression on my mind. I do not recall hearing a great deal of discussion about the nature of Scripture and the meaning of inspiration. Our little country church lived far from the theological controversies and debates going on elsewhere in the early part of this century. Though I cannot recall ever hearing the phrase, "the authority of the Scriptures," I never doubted that they carried authority. That was axiomatic and unquestioned. We turned to them for guidance for daily living and we found it.

Nor do I recall ever hearing the ministers speak of heilsgeschichte. But each year in the spring, our aged bishop would review the entire history of salvation in German, an undertaking which took several hours. The most dramatic parts were rendered with quivering chin and tears in his eyes. And in this way, long before Jerome Bruner (The Process of Education) laid it down as correct pedagogy that any body of knowledge can only be taught effectively when its internal structure has been grasped, I came to understand the historical frame of reference within which the first exodus and the second are part and parcel of the same event.

Another significant way I learned the Scriptures was through their incarnation in the life of our congregation. I claim no perfection in the way my people lived out the biblical vision but I did experience authenticity then and I recognize it now in

retrospect. They aspired to be faithful and they understood their symbols, practices and life style to be true expressions of God's will as revealed in the Bible. That their interpretations and applications may well have been unsophisticated and naive does not set this aside. They earnestly desired to know and to do the will of God. Furthermore, I knew that I belonged in this community and in belonging to it, I was also heir to the tradition which shaped it. Because my people had a long memory in which the biblical world was as real as the modern world (or more so), I came to share that memory, that tradition, that history and claim it as my own.

In this kind of setting I was taught the Bible, one in which the Bible was understood as having authority, in which the biblical history was recited regularly, and in which the community of faith understood the biblical history to be its very own history. I recall the curtained off area and the hard benches in the basement of the church building where our class met but I remember even more vividly the poster size pictures of biblical events and persons, the 3x5" card reproductions of those same pictures we were privileged to take home with us, and the eager enthusiasm of our teacher who explained their significance to us. I also remember being aware that he loved us.

I. HERMENEUTICS AND EDUCATIONAL THEORY

In a stimulating article "A Hermeneutical Approach to Educational Theory," H. Edward Everding, Jr., advances the "thesis that hermeneutics provides the proper frame of reference within which to develop educational theory;" he also focuses on "the interrelationship of biblical interpretation and teaching."¹ Providing a brief but well-documented summary of the interpretive process, Everding identifies some of the basic problems of interpretation which must be resolved: the transfer of meaning between text and interpreter, the distance between them in "time, space, language and thought," the difference between the presuppositions of the interpreter and those of the text, ² the problem of language, and the goal of interpretation.

Everding also identifies several hermeneutical approaches, including existentialist interpretation (Bultmann) in which "the original intention of the

text is retrieved through a dialogic process guided by the interpreter's own question."³ This process calls the interpreter to make a decision about his existence and to proclaim the meaning of the text and his decision in such a way that a new "event" may take place for his hearers. Everding then views some recent trends in interpretation as responses to existential hermeneutics: one stresses the meaning of history (Pannenberg); another stresses the social context (Moltmann's "political hermeneutics"); a third is based on an analysis of language; and a fourth is interdisciplinary in character and "probes the text for the images of faith which shape human behavior."⁴

Everding then identifies several implications for educational theory. Three educational goals are set forth: the student is to learn to read what the text says; the student is to learn what the text means; and the student is to gain new self-understanding in relation to the meaning of the text. This includes restructuring her way of thinking about herself and her world and the shaping of her life values.⁵ The achievement of these goals calls, in his judgment, for a participatory style of teaching/learning.

Everding's suggestions for educational theory leave much unsaid. His educational goals need further elaboration and greater precision as does his statement about the rationale for and the structures of participatory teaching/learning. Nonetheless, I believe they are on target and point us in the right direction.

The existentialist approach to hermeneutics which he seems to prefer emphasizes much which is helpful: e.g., the necessity for interpreters (teachers and students) to be aware of their presuppositions, the process of entering into vigorous conversation with the text--being addressed by it and bringing questions to it, the demand laid on the interpreter for decision, and the proclamation of one's discovery/decision in which the former event becomes present event. Everding is aware of the tendencies of existentialist hermeneutics toward individualism and relativism but does not, in my judgment, provide adequate safeguards and controls. Nor does he criticize its anti-historical bias.

II. LEARNING FROM ANABAPTISM

I believe that the experience of the early Anabaptists offers clues to an authentic model of biblical teaching in the congregation. Perhaps it is not too far from the mark to call what they were doing "Anabaptist existentialism" (in spite of the obvious anachronism) in which the triple threats to true biblical faith of individualism, relativism and anti-historicism were overcome.

Among the early Anabaptists were a number of Bible Schools, as they were called, in St. Gall and in Zurich where one Andrew Castelberger held Bible meetings teaching from the book of Romans. Later on Grebel and Manz also taught in Zürich; Grebel taught the Gospel of Matthew from the original Greek and Manz taught from the Hebrew Old Testament.⁶ One has to marvel at the seriousness of purpose with which these people came to their study of the Word of God in spite of great difficulties: no lesson books, unable to read the Scriptures in their own tongue, and after a time forbidden under the threat of punishment by the law to gather in this way.

Their study of the Word of God was a serious matter. They wanted to hear its message; they wanted to know the will of God; they were diligent in searching it out. Those first Bible Schools were not only a time for knowing the Word of God; they were also times for making decisions to do the will of God. They began to ask questions about their beliefs and their customs, questions that had smoldered for a long time but which like almost extinguished burning coals burst into flame from the gust of Scripture's fresh air.

What was the meaning of church membership? What did it mean to be a Christian? To be born from above? To be buried with Christ in baptism? To rise with him in newness of life and to walk with him in resurrection life? What actually takes place at the table of the Lord? How does one make ready for going to the table? How should one live when one has broken bread and then leaves the table to go out into the world again? How should one live as a Christian in society? What is the relation of the church to the government? What is the Christian attitude to war and military service? Who is my neighbor and how should I relate to him? What about suing at law or swearing an oath in court? These are only a few of the large and

difficult questions that burst into flame, questions that had been settled for years, but for which the old answers would no longer do.

This kind of Bible study is dangerous. A safer approach is simply to examine the Bible as though it were some ancient document far removed from life today, or to look for answers to the questions we bring to the text rather than to open ourselves to the questions which are placed upon us by the text and by the Lord of the text. In this kind of Bible study the questioner became the questioned. They were willing to have both their questions and answers challenged, and to be faced with new questions. They were also willing to make up their minds about those questions and to answer them forthrightly. In many instances it cost them their lives.

The key to the integrity of their approach to the Scriptures lay in the context in which they studied the Scriptures and the mindset they brought to the task. It did not lie in their intellectual superiority or in their technical skills of exegesis. Though there were a few scholars among them, they, for the most part like Jesus' original disciples, were common folk. What distinguished them in their study of the Bible was their openness to hear God's word of address and their readiness to respond in obedience and faith. Their Bible study took place in the context of obedience to God's requirement as they understood it and their mission to the world into which God sent them. It was a costly obedience which did not arise out of a desire to be heroic but out of the recognition that to know God's will is to do it. This, rather than an adherence to literalistic or legalistic ways of reading the Scriptures, is the reason for their emphasis upon discipleship.

III. LEARNING FROM MENNONITE EXPERIENCE TODAY

As part of the learnings in my 1976 course, Teaching the Bible in the Congregation, I sent a request to approximately 100 pastors and teachers throughout the church asking them to reflect on some problems or issues that they had been working with in their congregation and to share those with us in the form of a question which could be included in our area examinations. The issue should be one which causes the students to reflect on their biblical, historical and theological understandings in order to work toward

a resolution. In addition, they were asked to identify certain biblical passages which are of an unusually complex, sensitive, crucial or controversial nature in the life of the congregation. These were to be passages which they had recently used in preaching or teaching. They were asked to indicate briefly how they had gone about interpreting such passages and how the congregation had responded to this interpretation.

Alert to such things as which texts were studied and the frequency of mention, evident hermeneutical trends or principles, and evidence of how congregations responded (resistance, indifference, conflict, agreement), we (the class) looked for the hermeneutic at work in the congregations, especially how the Bible is being interpreted in relation to life. The 34 replies (19 MC, 15 GC) provided us with current data about living congregational agenda, and esppecially the context and the mindset in which biblical interpretation is going on in these congregations.

Several reported use of Old Testament texts such as Genesis 1-11, Exodus 19-24, The Psalms, Ezekiel and Daniel. Most, however, reported use of New Testament texts with a heavy concentration on Matthew (esp. chs. 5 and 19, followed by chs. 18 and 28); the book of Romans (esp. ch. 13); 1 Corinthians (esp. chs. 7, 11, and 12) and Revelation (esp. chs. 13 and 21). Matthew, Romans, 1 Corinthians and Revelation seem to represent the current Mennonite teaching canon, at least in these 34 congregations. Additional texts included Mark 10:1-12, Acts 15, Ephesians 5:21-31; Hebrews; 1 Peter 4:19; 3:1-7; and 1 John.

Issues repeatedly identified were family life issues, baptism and church membership, the Christian's relation to government, the charismatic movement, the structuring of congregational life, the mission of the local church in its community, conflict resolution, prophecy, and various ethical and life style concerns.

In the area of family life issues, the question of marriage, divorce and remarriage was mentioned by at least 12 persons. Related issues were headship in the home, singleness as over against marriage, the Christian interpretation of sexuality, premarital sexual standards, sexual infidelity, sexual ethics, abortion, marriage preparation and death and dying.

The issue of baptism and church membership included questions on how to deal with fringe, non-resident and inactive members, how to respond to

persons who wish to receive baptism without becoming a member of the congregation, the need for repentance and conversion and the importance of church discipline.

The issue of the relationship to government included such matters as capital punishment, the Christian and war, the payment of war taxes, nationalism, the prophetic role of the church and the peace witness.

In connection with the charismatic movement, questions about institutionalism vs. the exercise of charismatic gifts, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, baptism in the Spirit, and speaking in tongues were raised.

With respect to the structuring of congregational life concerns mentioned were the need for renewal, decision-making in the congregation, leadership, authority, unity and diversity, discipline, worship, the role of women in the church, and stewardship. A concern about symbolism in regard to footwashing and the wearing of the devotional veiling was also evident. Nine persons mentioned that they are struggling with the question of the veiling.

Several persons mentioned the question of prophecy, expressing concern about the impact of Hal Lindsey in their congregation as well as the Zionist view of events in the Middle East. There was strong interest in studying the book of Revelation. The impact of the sects, like Armstrongism, the Jehovah Witnesses and the Mormons on Mennonites was also identified.

In the category of various ethical and life style issues concerns such as gambling, lotteries, the use of alcohol, dancing, and the stewardship of our increasing wealth were included.

One person mentioned that he was including in his preaching/teaching such personal issues as anger, anxiety and forgiveness. A few were dealing with doctrinal themes such as the nature of man, the nature of God, sin, fall, and creation.

I selected the responses of the five persons who made their hermeneutical procedures most explicit. In their responses I saw the following principles of biblical interpretation at work (not all of them in every situation, of course):

1. The assumption that the Bible speaks with authority to the issues and questions we face in our situation today.

2. The vital interaction and interpenetration of the text with the living community of faith.

3. The insights of the biblical scholar (the teacher) and his scholarship should be offered to the congregation for testing rather than as the final word.

4. The assumption that the Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in the illumination of the meaning of the text and its application to our situation.

5. The recognition that the Word, the Spirit and the church must agree as to the meaning of the text for us.

6. The expectation that there must be decision and response to what we discern together, i.e., the recognition that the Bible touches life.

7. The recognition that our culture affects the way we hear and respond to the Bible.

8. The recognition that the culture of the biblical world affects the way the text is shaped and that we must understand the historical and cultural context of the text.

9. The importance of a framework of biblical history and theology within which to interpret particular texts.

10. The attention to literary forms and types as crucial to discerning the message of the text.

11. Attention to the process at work within the text itself in addressing the situation at hand.

12. The recognition of some of the obstacles to hearing the word of the Lord together (lack of love, lack of commitment, polarity, defensiveness, disobedience, arrogance, individualism).

One respondent submitted a two page outline entitled, "How I Handled a Controversial Passage, 1 Cor. 11:2-11." His hermeneutical procedure included the following steps:

1. He identified the background issues.

2. He dealt with the passage as part of a series on the whole book, not in isolation.

3. He illustrated from the text itself how Paul went about discerning the mind of Christ.

4. He identified his principles of interpretation: (a) What, if anything does Jesus say on the question? (b) What are Paul's best insights and judgments on the question? (c) What does the Spirit seem to be saying? (d) What is the best counsel of the brotherhood?

5. He identified the current issues and voices on the question.

6. He looked at the larger biblical context (other texts on the same issues).

7. He examined the cultural-social context and drew comparisons between then and now (the biblical world and our world).

8. He identified the central issue.

9. With the use of an overhead projector he drew two models elaborating the central issue. These models were attempts to state the biblical pattern in current terms. He identified one as the correct view and one as an incorrect view.

10. Following the sermon presentation he engaged in a discussion with members of the congregation who were interested in continuing the discussion through the second hour.

11. He stated that he offered his interpretation in a spirit of humility as one interpretation only, subject to the testing of the congregation.

IV. INTERPRETATION AS ENGAGEMENT

Teaching the Bible in the congregation is like producing a drama. As learners we begin by sitting in the audience while the action unfolds on the stage. We observe God's call to Abraham, the deliverance of the slaves from Egypt, the covenant at Sinai, the exile, the promise of the deliverer, the birth of Christ and his suffering, death and resurrection. Suddenly we discover that we are no longer in the audience but up on the stage, participants in the drama surrounded by the saints of all the ages. Or to change the image, we come out of the bleachers down on the field as players in the game. Or to change the image once again, we leave the television set where the war is portrayed on the screen, enlist in the army and go to the front to fight in the real war (Eph. 6:12).

What these biblical images of athlete and soldier suggest to me is that learning, in the biblical sense, is best accomplished in the context of engagement, involvement, participation. I really don't have much to suggest by way of changing our congregational study programs. By and large we have fairly good quarterlies and elective materials and, for the most part, we have teachers who are dedicated, sincere men and women of God who give marginal time in preparation

and teaching as they are able. The problem, as I see it, is not with the materials or the method; and it is not with the content, but with the context. If we are studying a set of issues because we desperately need that information to help us make a decision, and if we are in a situation where we must act on the basis of that information and decision, we will be virtually engaged with the material. Where the teaching program of the congregation is weak and anemic it may be because Bible study (and congregational life generally) is taking place in an inauthentic context. That is to say, if the congregation is not involved vitally in its mission in the world there will be no real questions on that congregation's agenda. In that event their Bible study may also lack integrity.

Another reason for some of the criticism of our adult Sunday school classes may lie in the area of inappropriate expectations. The adult Sunday school class is not, nor should it be, a seminary class with the kind of academic rigor that characterizes such a school. The Sunday school should be less oriented toward the academic end of the teaching/learning continuum and more toward the decision/action/obedience end. The Sunday school class is a community of conversation around the Scriptures. Its task is to build a common Christian vocabulary and to clarify the Christian meanings of that vocabulary. It should provide a place where the members test the purpose of their lives and the implications of their decisions, where an ethical consensus is developed both in formal and informal ways, and where members find a way to view and interpret the world in which they live from a biblical perspective, an alternative to the other perspectives which surround their daily life.

The task of teaching the Bible to children is essentially that of creating biblical literacy. It includes telling them the fascinating stories of the Bible, introducing them to the biblical characters, reliving with them the biblical drama, helping them discover the covenant structure of the Bible, and aiding them in their grasp of the essentials of the biblical message. The well-known word to Timothy serves as a pattern and points to the goal to this acquaintance "with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for your salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:14-15). Though the process which nurtured and instructed Timothy was family-

based, the same goal applies to teaching in the congregation.

Conclusion

Let us reflect once more upon the task of hermeneutics as it is expressed in teaching the Bible in the congregation. The basic goal of hermeneutics, as of teaching, is to clarify communication, to facilitate a conversation. The conversation we have in mind is the conversation between God and the people of God today. The medium through which God is speaking is the text of the Scriptures. Conversation is not easy, even at best when both parties are physically present in the same place at the same time speaking the same language. When the conversation is not a direct verbal one but is channeled through the medium of a written document in a foreign language it becomes more difficult. When that document is an ancient text reflecting a conversation that is several thousand years old addressed to other principals than the present readers, and in a life situation very different in many respects from that of the readers, conversation becomes increasingly complex. The task of the facilitator of this conversation, who stands between the parties in conversation while at the same time being a party to the conversation, is well nigh impossible. Yet this is the challenge of the task of teaching.

The teacher operates on the assumption that this conversation can come alive in the congregation and that once again the living Lord of the text will speak through the text to his people now. The historical document records that original conversation. The task of interpretation has as its goal the revival of that original conversation. The task of reconstructing the ancient text and deciphering its meaning in its original setting is not the end of the process but one of the means to the end, a living conversation. We reconstruct the original conversation so that we may participate in it.

This requires not only all the cognitive skills of which we are capable in reconceptualizing the original conversation but also the rebirth of the imagination which produced the language which was the medium of that conversation. The early communities were shaped by a living response to the Lord who addressed them. The images by which they communicated were born out of their life together in covenant. The

community of faith today shall only be able to understand those images as it participates in that same response to the living Lord and shares in that same covenant out of which the images emerged. An analysis of that language without a rebirth of the experience to which it bears witness will be somewhat empty, like form without substance.

This is why there must be some continuity between the early and the present contexts. Certainly there are discontinuities between these two worlds and we are sufficiently aware of these that no documentation is required. But there can be sufficient continuity at the point where it matters most to enable us to join in that conversation. The agenda with which the congregation wrestles today may differ in certain details from the agenda of the congregations of the first century, for example. But if our agenda arises out of our faithfulness to the Lord as we hear him speak and as we respond in faith, love and obedience, we shall be able to listen and to speak as full participants in their conversation.

NOTES

1. Marvin J. Taylor, ed., Foundations for Christian Education in an Era of Change (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 41.

2. Ibid., pp. 42-43.

3. Ibid., p. 47.

4. Ibid., p. 49.

5. Ibid., pp. 49-50.

6. J. C. Wenger, Glimpses of Mennonite History and Doctrine (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1949), pp. 23-4.

7. These replies came from congregations in eleven states and four provinces distributed as follows: Ontario, 6; Pennsylvania, 5; Iowa, Kansas and Manitoba, 3 each; Colorado, Ohio, Oregon and Saskatchewan, 2 each; and Alberta, Arizona, Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska and Oklahoma, 1 each.

TEACHING THE BIBLE IN THE CONGREGATION

Richard C. Detweiler

I. BASIC FUNCTIONS OF TEACHING THE BIBLE

Paul's counsel to Timothy suggests three functions for the teaching of the Bible: the salvational (or salvific) function, the nurture function, and the equipping function (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

A. The Salvational Function

The teaching of the Bible is not to be seen as an end in itself. The purpose of becoming "acquainted with the sacred writings" (RSV) is to provide the instruction necessary to enable persons to know how to respond to Jesus Christ by faith for salvation.

This may suggest a pre-conversion function of Bible teaching. In a broader sense, however, the salvific function is never outgrown since salvation is an ongoing process of "being saved" as well as a beginning encounter in which our life is regenerated to make possible the "working out" of our salvation. Our salvational teaching task then is not that we use the Bible only to lead persons to confess Christ as Savior and then go on from there to use the Scriptures as ethical instruction. The *didache*, rather, is rooted in the *kerygma* and needs to be taught in that perspective if it is to "make wise unto salvation" (KJV), rather than engender moralism and legalism.

Furthermore, the Bible is not only revealed content by which persons are instructed in the Gospel and enabled to know how to respond to salvation offered in Christ. It is also the medium of revelation by which the Word addresses us as personal encounter. We need not strain to distinguish between teaching the Bible as propositional truth that makes wise unto salvation and "truth as encounter" that vitalizes faith-response. The two are not antithetical, but dependent on each other for efficacy in the salvific function of Bible teaching.

It is helpful to remember that teaching, even teaching of the Bible, is a penultimate activity until it becomes cooperation with the teaching of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-16), whereby only the salvational function can be realized. Otherwise, again, the teaching of Scripture becomes an end in itself rather

than instrumental to salvation.

Teaching is the telling of the biblical story and its meaning, in the faith that he of whom the story is told draws near and discloses himself so that in the telling and hearing an awareness of salvation occurs. Truth as revelational proposition becomes truth as encounter. Saving truth becomes truth as saving encounter, culminating in the response of saving faith.

B. The Nurture Function

The nurture function of Bible teaching is to enable "learning Christ" (Eph. 4:20), and growing up into Him in all things (Eph. 4:15). Teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness are best viewed as the goal of development in right relation with God, or as Peter states it: "But grow in the grace and (experiential or relational) knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18a, NIV).

As the salvational function of Bible teaching is essential both in pre-conversion and post-conversion, so also the nurture function is essential for both periods of experience. "Becoming wise unto salvation" continues to be an integral dimension of growth into maturity, lest what has "begun in the Spirit" (gospel) be completed "in the flesh" (moralism). Conversely, instruction in righteousness is also integral to the salvational function of the Gospel, lest the Gospel become understood as cheap grace that only "looks to the cross" or "comes to the foot of it" rather than taking it up, making of salvation a forensic transaction.

The nurture function of teaching the Bible depends on our understanding of the relation of Law and Gospel, grace and discipleship, and righteousness as imputed, imparted, or relational. An oversimplified perspective may be that we teach the Bible not as truth alone, but as "the truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21), which means that to fulfill the nurture function, the Bible must always be taught in relation to what is and can be in Christ, actualized by the Holy Spirit.

As an illustration of the nurture function, it may be appropriate here to note the pre-conversion and post-conversion aspects of teaching the Bible in relation to the teaching of children. Our perception of the child with regard to our purpose in teaching

the Bible still needs clarification. The Foundation Series curriculum orients teaching the Bible to the concept that the Bible is the story of the People of God. That is theologically sound and pedagogically helpful. We need yet, however, to clarify more sharply the developmental location of the child within the movement of the People of God defined as the Christian congregation.

I have found it helpful to teachers, pastors and parents to perceive the child in three developmental stages, namely, the stage of innocence (infancy to 5 or 6 years), awareness (ages 7 to 11), and awakening (ages 12 to 18), granting the ages to be approximate ranges rather than absolutes.

The age of innocence which "cannot discern between the right and left hand" calls for teaching the Bible primarily as affirmation of God's love, goodness and presence. The age of awareness experiences a relationship with God on a deeper level than innocence. It is characterized by the development of unease which, however, is not yet spiritual awakening to lostness as a state. Nevertheless, it calls for teaching the Bible not only as affirmation, but as interpretation of God's love and goodness which introduces basic teachings on forgiveness of sins and the concept that rightness with God is the gift of forgiveness offered in Jesus Christ. Since the child in the age of awareness seeks assurance of being forgiven and in right relation with God, the teaching of the Bible is oriented to the assumptions: (a) that the child in the age of awareness is capable of a forgiveness-encounter with God which merits acceptance and affirmation as valid on his level, but (b) that the child's awareness of a forgiveness-encounter is not yet of an awakened character (wise unto salvation) and is not regarded as conversion, but anticipates a further encounter and is led to expect the same.

The age of awakening represents awareness at a new level and of a different nature. It progressively recognizes cognitively and experientially (affectively) the state of lostness as one's condition of separation from God. It calls for teaching the Bible not only as affirmation of God's love and goodness, and interpretation of God's love as offering the forgiveness of sins, but as confrontation with the Gospel as the call to a crisis turn from self-orientation to the following of

Christ as Lord (finding one's life in Him). The teaching of the Bible in the awakening years is focused on clarifying the nature of believing response as a response to God's grace not primarily as relief from guilt, but as confrontation with Christ as sin-bearer and Lord of life, whom to confess displaces self and yields to dependence on Him as God's way, truth, and life. Teaching the Bible to children as a nurture function, therefore, is oriented progressively to affirmation, interpretation, and confrontation-response, all of which are essential as well to the salvational function. In other words, the nurture function is to enable responding to God both to and in salvation.

The crucial point in developing the illustration of nurture-teaching above is that the teaching of the Bible in the congregation is shaped largely by the presuppositions or assumptions that prevail as to whom we are teaching, and to what purpose. The nurture function of teaching the Bible has particularly to do with our theological perceptions. It is, in other words, a primary hermeneutical task to test and clarify the assumptions underlying our teaching of the Bible. We must reckon with the fact that the hermeneutic of Bible teaching in the congregation is largely determined by congregational conditioning. That means a, if not the, primary way both the salvational and nurture functions of teaching the Bible are effectively carried on is what we may call as above, "congregational conditioning", that is, creating the overall assumptions by which biblical truth is perceived and how it is to be responded to.

The Bible teaching-learning process does not occur as a direct line from Bible to persons, but in relation to the conditioned context in which the teaching-learning takes place. The conditioning of the context is a basic dimension of the nurture function. Paul indicates this perspective in his statement, "...continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it..." (2 Tim. 2:14, RSV), which illustrates furthermore that the context of teaching-learning is largely relationships, and that the development of relationships has much to do with hermeneutical conditioning.

Robert R. Boehlke in his Theories of Learning in Christian Education (Westminster, 1962) projects a learning theory he calls "creation-engagement":

The concerns of Christian nurture are learned as God creates new selves through the engagement of persons with their field of relationships... (p. 288).

Nurture is enabling persons to conceptualize and actualize the meaning of their commitment to Jesus Christ in terms of family, school, vocational, personal, social, and world relationships. Boehlke's explanation of what takes place is:

The dynamics of learning are operative as the learner is existentially motivated to engage and to restructure his field of relationships, and as these perceptual processes are utilized by the Holy Spirit to bring about encounter and response to Jesus Christ (p. 195).

The Bible is essential to providing the direction to that "restructuring of the field of relationships," and is instrumental by the activity of the Holy Spirit to bring about the restructuring, which is called in the scriptures, growing up into Christ. Boehlke's creation-engagement idea of learning is closely related to what Richards speaks of in relating nurture to socialization. (A Theology of Christian Education, Zondervan, 1975). From that approach, Richards derives the point "that the whole church teaches" (pp. 80,81). The medium becomes a significant hermeneutic of the message and of its reception as well.

That leads us to a third function of teaching the Bible, namely, equipping. The question of effectiveness in congregational teaching is one of how we go about equipping the "whole church" to become a teaching, nurturing community that enables response to Christ and growth in Him, and the performing of ministry needed within and outside the Body.

C. The Equipping Function

Teaching the Bible has to do with thoroughly equipping persons for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). This may be seen primarily as the task of adult education in the congregation. The equipping function has been the least effectively realized in congregational Bible teaching. That is because we have further need to: (a) associate our teaching of the Bible with the goal of mission, (b) become more clear on how the Bible is to be utilized for ministries other than preaching and teaching, (c)

relate the teaching of the Bible to the discernment and exercise of spiritual gifts for ministry, and (d) explore the potential of the congregational context as a viable context for training persons for ministry.

The salvational and nurture functions of teaching the Bible have in view the further goal of equipping for ministry. We have shied away from developing a mechanical system of Bible teaching used by some sects and cults whereby persons are prepared to anticipate questions and provide answers in establishing one's own framework of faith and mastering a proficient pattern of communicating it to others.

But we have not yet developed an alternative whereby the congregation as a whole is adequately equipped for ministry and mission. Equipping for ministry as a distinct function of Bible teaching in the congregation has been called into question in favor of the view that "building a nurturing church assures a growing maturity which will naturally express itself in communication, and reproduction, of God's life in others through the living communication of His Good News" (Richards, p. 122).

I believe we cannot assume as does the above quotation that the salvational and nurture functions of Bible teaching, if properly done, will inevitably and adequately result in ministry and mission apart from a more deliberate equipping. A major reason that our Body ministry has not been maximized as one would expect in a brotherhood style of church, and that our mission, especially that of evangelism, has been lagging, is that we need not only to nurture persons, but equip them by and with the scriptures if they are to "hold forth the word of life" in various forms of ministry essential to nurture and mission. The area of teaching the Bible as training for ministry and mission may be the pioneering edge of our congregational endeavors to which we should be addressing our biblical education.

II. PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES IN TEACHING THE BIBLE AS A HERMENEUTIC TASK.

A. Effective Bible teaching in the congregation moves toward the goal of growth in understanding, while maintaining the integrity both of teachers and the congregation in the process.

Pastors and teachers trained in biblical studies frequently employ a hermeneutic approach different

from the hermeneutic assumptions by which many or most congregational members seek to understand the scriptures. In order to teach with integrity, pastors and teachers need to resolve the tension between enabling persons to develop more adequate textual and hermeneutical understandings while at the same time maintaining and undergirding the security of trust in the authority of the scriptures.

This may be attempted by: (a) using the descriptive vocabulary of the average congregational member in biblical study, but giving new conceptualizations to the meaning of the words, (b) explaining the principles of interpretation and then teaching how to employ them in reading and understanding the Bible, (c) actualizing the principles of interpretation in practice through enabling congregational members to exercise their gifts in Bible study and interpretation. The latter of the three options may best meet the objective of hermeneutic growth. It does not assume either the teacher(s) or members to be infallible interpreters, but respects and utilizes the gifts and integrity of both as essential to biblical understanding in the context of Holy Spirit operation.

The informed, reflective dimension of Bible interpretation contributed by the pastor-teachers needs interaction with the action-oriented approach of congregational members to become a Spirit-shaped hermeneutic fruitful to growth in understanding on the part of all. The key to growth in sound understanding of the Scriptures is not primarily teaching right principles of interpretation, but in the freeing and enabling of the spiritual gifts of teaching, wisdom, knowledge, discernment, and others that Christ has given to the Body to rightly handle the word of truth. That is the way the authority of the Bible becomes the authoritative Word in the congregation. Other biblical interpretation may be an imposed authority of the pastor-teacher or an imposed authority of an inadequately informed congregation.

Biblical scholarship represented by experienced pastors and teachers needs to be brought together with the insights and experience of members who move daily in the stream of life in the world of family, school, vocation, and community. Biblical interpretation cannot be done authentically alone in an ivory tower away from life, lest it become sterile and irrelevant. However, the knowledge and insights of pastors and

teachers are essential to maintain sound doctrine that otherwise becomes distorted and misled by members' constant exposures to the mind and practices of the world and various streams of theological influence by popular writings, radio, and the like.

A beautiful example of combining the biblical-theological with the practical is seen in Peter's warning about wresting the writings of his brother apostle Paul, which says Peter, are difficult but trustworthy and need to be received with his own simpler writings. The interpretations of either scholars or fishermen apart from each other are incomplete (2 Pet. 3:14-18).

B. Effective Bible teaching is oriented to response and decision and therefore needs to be related to living issues confronting the congregation.

The dynamic of obedient discipleship was operative at the heart of the early Anabaptist approach to Bible as a hermeneutic community. As James Smart emphasizes, in his The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church (Westminster, 1970), the Bible is not a private book designed primarily for devotional reading, but a community book by which the church hears its marching orders. Bible teaching becomes academic and sterile or pietistically internalized and socially irrelevant when it is not oriented to the search for authority relative to decision. Ministerial leaders and congregational teachers need to interact with other members on issues involving biblical interpretation to gain experience in exercising the gifts of the Spirit together in order to discern the mind of Christ. It is in the process of wrestling with the meaning of the scriptures as related to a living issue calling for obedient response, that a congregation discovers its own hermeneutic most authentically. Therefore it is in the context of that process that teaching the Bible encounters its most crucial opportunity. That is not to minimize teaching that is preparatory to and anticipates issues or needs that are not yet or at the moment at hand. But even such preparatory teaching needs to be oriented to the concept that the knowing of the truth is ultimately decision.

Teaching the Bible in the context of living issues helps to unify the letter and spirit of Scripture. The unifying principle in the Anabaptist understanding of the relation of "letter and Spirit"

was their "theology of discipleship" existentially realized. When believers are committed to following Christ in obedience for decision-making the scriptural word is made fruitful by the Spirit as a "living letter in the heart" (Marpeck). The tension between the letter and the spirit of scripture is not resolved on the level of theory in a vacuum. The resolution takes place when the scriptures and the Spirit are received together in existential appropriation.

C. Bible teaching needs to enable the congregation in the process of mutual exhortation by which learning-to-obedience occurs.

Mutual study of the Scriptures was the key to Anabaptist growth. Harold Bender wrote that the beginnings of the movement in Switzerland and Holland were anchored in Bible study meetings (Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I: "Bibelstunde"). John Howard Yoder and others have stressed that the right interpretation of Scripture was determined largely through discussion and debate within the fellowship of the congregation, in contrast to the more clerical hermeneutic approach of the Reformers. George Williams concurs that "the principle of inspired corporate interpretation of the Bible was the presupposition of much of the committed conversation (Gesprach) within Anabaptism and between Anabaptism and the magisterial Protestantism" (The Radical Reformation [Westminster, 1962], p. 289).

If understanding and appropriation of the Scriptures occur through mutual exhortation, the equipping and enabling of persons becomes a crucial aspect of teaching. The scholarly leadership of Grebel, Manz and others illustrates the enabling function, although Grebel's tendency toward literalism may modify the point that his scholarship was "enabling." The preparation of Bible concordances by Anabaptists in very early stages of the movement is another illustration of equipping.

Ministerial leaders and congregational teachers need to exercise their leadership roles and gifts as enablers. The patterns of utilizing gifts as outlined in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12 are those of the congregational teaching-learning process. The pastoral, teaching, and leadership-office gifts interacting with what may be termed the non-office gifts of wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, discernment, faith (a representative list only) provides a way of going about biblical study and interpretation for

understanding and decision that is both responsibly ordered and dynamically creative.

Teachers in our Sunday schools and in other teaching roles and settings should have opportunities to develop biblical and theological understandings that facilitate their becoming effective enablers of others. We have not given adequate attention to and therefore have not developed a viable hermeneutic community, i.e., a corporate teaching model.

Provisions for more in-depth biblical training such as teacher-disciple programs, Bible institutes and seminars, ministers and lay leader-teacher study weeks, teaching apostles and other means need development and implementation. We are not yet altogether outside some parallel to H. S. Bender's description when he writes:

But it was in the Anabaptist movement, with its strong emphasis upon personal religious experience, adult baptism, and every-member participation in the life of the church, where no theological training was possible for the preachers and elders, who had to be chosen from the working laity, and where the emphasis upon brotherhood was strong in contrast to the state church with their clerical emphasis, that Bible study meetings were common (Mennonite Encyclopedia, "Bibelstunde").

It is admitted that the concept, "the whole church teaches," runs the risk of operating with a good deal less than the equipping and commitment needed to make it work, and the even greater risk of being aborted by individualism and the "tyranny of the people." But the still greater risk may be what Randolph Crump Miller calls "The Church of the Immaculate Perception" (Christian Nurture and the Church, Scribner's, 1961), which says Miller, "runs so smoothly nothing ever happens" (p. 76). Whether the corporate model of congregational education becomes effective depends upon the equipping function of teaching.

This then may be the place to underscore the role of the seminary in the equipping function of teaching the Bible in the congregation. There are at least five potential ways for the seminary to contribute to this task: (a) by training pastor-teachers for congregational preaching-teaching ministries through developing both biblical competency and teaching-preaching effectiveness through supervised

experience in study and practice; (b) by providing continuing education opportunities for ministers, teachers and others through seminars and institutes both on and off campus; (c) by making faculty persons available for more extended teaching ministries in regional, conference, and congregation settings; (d) by encouraging faculty participation in studies and interaction with church leaders out of which teaching materials and hermeneutic directions are shaped and become resources for congregational teaching; and (e) by involvement of faculty members in local congregation teaching ministries whereby they experience operating as part of the hermeneutic community and are equipped further by that involvement to equip others.

D. Teaching the Bible in the congregation utilizes both formal and informal settings.

What has thus far been said implies church or church-related settings planned for teaching activity with deliberate design and purpose. We may maximize the Bible teaching potential in the congregation by recognizing the possibilities in settings that are not viewed primarily from a teaching perspective. In these contexts understandings of what the Bible says and means may be formed.

1. The "Worship Service". In our tradition the gathered worship assembly is mostly educational in nature and function. Preaching is central. We do well to give more energy to expository preaching.

2. Ritual occasions. While the patterns of gathered worship constitute themselves as an educative ritual, the high-point rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper are most expressional and educational. Baptism initiates into discipling; communion "remembers" and "anticipates." Footwashing intensifies and concretizes the awareness of brotherhood and servanthood.

3. Other church functions as Bible-teaching settings. A church council or similar meeting can become a most pertinent Bible-teaching setting: as, e.g., when the council discusses whether a "business" meeting should be held on Sunday morning since that time should be preserved for "worship;" when a council faces the question of what to do about an accumulated non-active list of members (occasioning discussion of the meaning of sin, grace, discipline, and the church as covenant-community); and when the council and congregation decides whether a "charismatic" group

might use the church facilities as their meeting place. Special interest group meetings, congregational retreats, wedding and funeral occasions, the home and family, are only select representative contexts in which the teaching of the Bible directly or indirectly can become part of the transformational dynamic shaping the church into the purposes of God.

The goal of the pastor-teacher should be to maximize learning in a variety of settings; he should not depend only upon the one-way flow pattern of the one leader (pastor-teacher) to the two hundred (congregation). Rather, as Lawrence O. Richards says:

...we need to realize in thinking of adult education that each of the strategy settings [$1 \leftrightarrow 1$, $1 \rightarrow 200$, $10 \leftrightarrow 10$, $200 \leftrightarrow 200$] has a value and a place in the total experience of adults. Traditionally the church relied on the 1-200...to transmit the faith....the product of this "single strategy" approach to ministry has necessarily been an intellectualized faith, which has come to be experienced more as a "belief" than as a "life." But this does not mean we should repudiate this strategy entirely...Instead it means we need to carefully define the function of the one-way strategy, develop it carefully to fulfill this function, and at the same time provide a balanced experience of learning by developing the other three strategy approaches as well (A Theology of Christian Education [Zondervan, 1975], p. 254).

Conclusion

The excitement of teaching the Bible in the congregation has been voiced well by J. Randall Nichols (quoting Clement Welsh): the sacred story intersecting with our story causes "a burst of light like a comet entering our atmosphere. The shock of its appearance is like the recurrence in daylight of an episode recalled from our dreams" (Princeton Seminary Bulletin, Winter, 1976).

Teaching the Bible in the congregation then mediates the divine presence; it is a transgenerational event in which the story of the People of God becomes again and again our story. The Word that caused the light to shine out of darkness addresses us today. Indeed, it can happen here!

PREACHING THE BIBLE IN THE CHURCH

Erland Waltner

Biblical scholarship and biblical preaching are not two things, but one. The biblical scholar is a preacher or he is no true scholar--he has not understood his own subject. (C. K. Barrett, Biblical Problems and Biblical Preaching, [Fortress, 1964] pp. 32, 48)

My purpose in this paper is to call attention to a particular setting in the congregation and an identifiable form of communication which we call "preaching" and to reflect on how this is related to hermeneutical issues. I perceive this relationship in at least two ways, namely (1) that hermeneutical issues must become the concern of responsibly informed preachers who serve in Mennonite pulpits or their equivalent, and (2) that preaching experience, broadly understood, may itself make a significant contribution to the larger hermeneutical process.

When I speak of preaching, I have in mind biblical preaching. A definition developed through several years of "teaching" preaching, which reflects my commitment to biblically grounded proclamation, is as follows:

Biblical preaching is the proclamation of the Living Word (Jesus Christ), as known according to the Written Word (the Bible), communicated by means of the Spoken Word (the Sermon), in the context of the community of the Word (the Church), as a dimension of its ministry in the world (the Mission).

Biblical preaching finds its source and shape in a careful study of the Bible. It is Christocentric because Jesus Christ is also the Lord of the Bible. It is deeply relevant to real human need, speaking to the lostness and the longings, the hopes and the fears, the questions and the meanings of human life. It is both prophetic and redemptive in its purpose, proclaiming Jesus Christ as the One through whom man's personal and corporate salvation is found. It calls for a response, a verdict, a commitment, an act of obedience.

When I speak of preaching, I do not distinguish this sharply from teaching in the congregation.

While recognizing a basic validity of C. H. Dodd's distinction between kerygma and didache in the patterns of communication used in the early church (The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments, 1936), my further study of the New Testament and my experiences with both preaching and teaching in congregational settings have moved me to agree more with Robert C. Worley in Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church (1967). He challenges some implications of Dodd's analysis and pleads that in application to the life and ministry of congregations, it is not appropriate that sharp distinctions between preaching and teaching be maintained, either conceptually or functionally. Much of what I say then could be read as teaching-preaching, although my focus here is deliberately on "pulpit ministry" or its equivalent.

I. THE POSSIBILITIES OF PREACHING

1. Preaching is still valued by most congregations. In spite of the criticisms of preaching and of preachers, congregations continue to give good preaching a high rating in their desires and expectations of those who would minister among them. This word comes from those who work administratively with the "placement" of ministers, from congregational "pastoral search committees," and from impressionistic surveys. One such survey which some seminary colleagues and I made recently as part of an AMBS study on "Preaching in AMBS Theology and Curriculum" yielded as a first observation that:

The clearest affirmation made by the responses (181 out of a total of 249) is that preaching is viewed as essential to congregational life and that it should happen every week.

Fifty seven considered it a "traditional option of continuing value;" twelve considered it "occasionally helpful but diminishing in value," while only four out of the total considered it "antiquated, un-Anabaptist, or irrelevant." Whatever our own personal judgments on the matter may be, most of those with whom we at AMBS work consider preaching important.

2. Preaching as opportunity for community building. Pulpit ministry, whether preaching or teaching or exhortation, continues to provide a setting in which it is possible for a whole larger

congregation of persons to assemble to "hear the Word" as articulated by one or more "preachers." This larger congregation is generally inter-generational, including the children and possibly the grandparents. It thus serves as a common setting and provides a common listening experience for younger and older persons and so should serve, ideally at least, to unite rather than divide the family. It becomes an occasion when the Word, though spoken in human words, may address persons in the totality of their being, cognitively, affectively, and volitionally.

It is a situation in which church can really be church, crossing the human boundaries commonly set by age, sex, race, occupation, education, economic status, disposition, etc. It is a moment of opportunity scarcely duplicated anywhere else in our society.

3. Preaching as continuing tradition. Beginning with the prophets of the Old Testament, used by Jesus during his ministry, and much in evidence in the apostles, prophets, and teachers of the early church, and--with various levels of faithfulness--in Christian history, including the Anabaptist-Mennonite experience, preaching, moreover, has a strong continuing tradition. Menno Simons said,

The Gospel, the Word of God, preached without admixture in the power of the Spirit is the only right and proper Seed from which truly believing and obedient children of God are born.

Walter Klaassen in an article on "The Preacher and Preaching" in *Anabaptism* notes, "There is no doubt whatever that the Anabaptists believed preaching to be one of the priorities of those who were called by God through the church" (Concern No. 9, p. 30). He quotes Pilgram Marpeck (1542),

It is undeniable and irrefutable that this is the first, through which the church came into being and still does, namely the proclamation of the Holy Gospel of Christ (ibid.).

4. Preaching in the Listening Community of the Word. If the Believers' Church is indeed to be the "Community of the Word," and if it is to experience renewal in the best sense, then as Wilbert R. Shenk observes in his foreword to John Driver's, Community and Commitment (Herald, 1976),

To discern God's will for His people will require more than listening to the world's

drumbeat. God's call to His people today will be heard clearly only by a reverent and intense listening to His Word under the illumination of the Spirit (p. 11).

Both the setting in which preaching usually takes place and the process which preaching at its best represents offer at least the possibility for such "reverent and intense listening."

Without making the pulpit an idol and without pleading any kind of near infallibility for those who speak there, we would do well also in our seminary communities to give preaching continued consideration as one of the ministries through which God can work to renew people. But if what happens in Mennonite preaching is not inspired and informed by faithfulness to the Bible and is thus a proclamation of distortion rather than of faithfulness, we who criticize such preachers and such congregations from our college or seminary campuses cannot be lighthearted about the matter. The hermeneutical insights which come to us need to be shared in appropriate ways with the congregations and this will scarcely happen without our giving serious attention to preaching ministry. We may ourselves be called upon to serve in these same pulpits and we are indeed expected to help prepare persons in our schools for hermeneutically responsible preaching ministries.

II. POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PREACHING EXPERIENCE TO HERMENEUTICS

Whatever we may be able to contribute as theological teachers to bring new faithfulness to Mennonite preaching, we ought not overlook the contributions which the preaching experience itself can make to the shape and substance of the hermeneutical enterprise. I propose several ways in which such contributions can come.

1. The thrust of evangelism. C. K. Barrett has already reminded us that a biblical scholar will already know that the Bible needs to be "preached." This was essentially also the posture of Karl Barth, Dietrich Ritschl, Helmut Thielicke, and Donald G. Miller and others who have written vigorously on the nature and urgency of biblical preaching.

The old question asked of the findings of biblical studies, "Will it preach?" is not altogether irrelevant. When students in the classroom keep saying (as some do), "We would never be able to say

these things in the churches," they may be telling us as college and seminary professors something important. If Jesus Christ is Lord of the Bible and also Lord of the Church, then the essential truth of Jesus Christ must remain "preachable" in the most profound sense. The experience of preaching, as the sharing of the truth of Jesus Christ with other persons, is a strategic reminder of the priorities of the church's mission in the world. The experience of preaching can be a safeguard against esoteric hermeneutics, against elitism in biblical studies, and against confusing means for ends in biblical scholarship. The biblical scholar absorbed in hermeneutics needs to keep asking, "What is the Good News (the Gospel) in the findings of this research?" Otherwise we may continue to be puzzled with James Smart over The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church.

2. The thrust toward dialogue. Faithful preaching experience is also a movement toward responsible participation in the congregation as hermeneutic community. Reuel Howe has helped us to perceive "pastors and people" as being Partners in Preaching. The underlying premise of this, however, is that those who speak from pulpits and those who listen are engaged in authentic Christian dialogue. They are persons who not only can "say" something. They have learned to listen. This too was the awareness of Jesus when he said repeatedly, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This too is the concern in the Word to the seven churches of Asia Minor, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

An important key then for hermeneutics, biblically, is to learn to listen. Such biblical listening can happen especially in the preaching experience, particularly when the "preacher" learns how to listen "reverently and intently" to the agonizing questions and cries of his people. It can happen when the people who listened "reverently and intently" to the sermon have opportunity to enter into dialogue with one another to ferret out the particular meanings and applications for their own life of obedience, witness, and service.

Clearly this means that a monological way of perceiving preaching is no longer tenable. It assumes that dialogical understandings and appropriate mechanisms for true dialogue prevail.

3. The thrust toward clarity. One of the basic criteria for effective preaching structure and style is clarity. When preaching ministry is undertaken with full seriousness, every utterance is tested by the question, "Is it clear?" or "Does it communicate what is intended?" The goal is a lofty one and not often achieved fully.

The achievement of clarity calls not only for precision in our study of the biblical texts and their meanings in their own time among God's people then; it calls also for an examination of communication styles, vocabulary, modes of expression, and particularly for "feedback" as to what the people are hearing and perceiving, how they are made to feel and act or react, and whether purposes which are either implicit or explicit in the preacher are being actualized in the impact on and the response of the hearers.

Such a concern about clarity, essential in a valid and on-going preaching experience, has implications for hermeneutics, especially for its vocabulary. A comment of the late C. S. Lewis to Norman Pittenger is apropo, "Any fool can write 'learned' language. The vernacular is the real test. If you can't turn your faith into it, then either you can't understand it or you don't believe it."

4. The thrust toward contextualization. Even as the biblical scholar needs to keep on reminding the preacher that in the use of Scripture s/he must give attention to literary, historical, and cultural contexts, so the preacher may remind the biblical scholar that Christian truth needs to find expression in terms that are appropriate and intelligible in the contemporary context of the congregation.

The hermeneutical community is not yet functioning holistically if it does not look seriously at its own situation in the world and seek to understand it in the light of Jesus Christ as Lord of the Bible. It follows from the very nature of the biblical message, coming as it does in particular contexts, that the context for contemporary application must be scrutinized and understood with a seriousness which is comparable to that with which we pursue the nuances of meanings of Hebrew verb forms or Greek tenses in a particular historical setting. Preaching experience can help the hermeneutic community remain "in the world" even as it proclaims that we are "not of the world."

5. The thrust toward authenticity. For some preachers the pulpit is a place to hide. This, of

course, turns out to be an illusion, for few preachers succeed in hiding there very long. The pulpit is an exposed place. It reminds us eloquently of our humanity, our vulnerability, and our peccability. Once we begin to take preaching seriously, we have to take ourselves seriously. Preaching the Word, as Suzanne de Dietrich put it, is like "wielding a two-edged sword without handle, which cuts the hand of him who wields it." So it turns out that the preacher as "sword-handler" stands there bleeding, and once the people know that s/he too is bleeding with them, the Spirit has an opening to save, reconcile, and heal. Preaching as a venture in exposure, even more than a classroom lecture, thrusts the interpreter in the direction of authenticity. This is highly significant for the hermeneutical process.

III. SOME MAJOR PROBLEMS FOR HERMENEUTICS IN PREACHING

Having begun with an affirmation that preaching in the congregation needs to be informed and shaped by a responsible hermeneutical process in the context of a "Community of the Word," I would identify now a few of the major problems of preaching which need address.

George E. Sweazey in Preaching the Good News (1976) lists some of the common ways in which preachers misuse their Bibles: (1) proof-texting out of context, (2) pre-texting (using a text to provide a phrase which then is used to talk about matters not even mentioned in the passage), (3) text stretching (sometimes called eisegesis), (4) text twisting (using the text to say something different than it intended to say), (5) text desertion (the text gets "the sermon into orbit and is then jettisoned," as well as (6) failing to note that within Scripture certain sayings are rejected (such as those of the friends of Job), (7) allegorizing (as in the way some parables have been interpreted), (8) embellishment (by attempting to fill in too many details in the biblical record which the Spirit-led writer wisely left out). The list, obviously, could be extended. The sins of preachers are many indeed.

1. The Problem of Archaizing. In a somewhat broader framework, I would identify as a first major problem the danger of archaizing the biblical message by becoming unduly preoccupied in preparation and in preaching with the "then and there" elements in biblical interpretation at the expense of giving

adequate attention to the contemporary meaning and application. This, as James Smart laments is a pitfall of historical-critical studies which, with all their skill in analyzing the make-up and background of a biblical text, are not yet able to identify contemporary relevance. Unless balanced with other approaches and concerns, this turns biblical study eventually into antiquarianism and biblical preaching into a kind of museum lecture. Eventually this leads to silence in the pulpit and emptiness in the pew.

2. The Problem of Modernizing. Another major danger is the consequent "modernizing" of the biblical message in such a way that the historical biblical roots are ignored or lost. For those who follow this approach, whether in the classroom or in the pulpit, the Bible eventually becomes unimportant. "Biblical Seminaries" turn into "Divinity Schools." The pulpit becomes a platform for the best in current religious thought, an opportunity for the preacher to vent his/her most recent inspiration, or an occasion to celebrate whatever is "interesting, exciting" or "creative and innovative." The fact that these adjectives are so prevalent in our current vocabulary in describing what is happening in our congregations may in itself serve as a signal that we may no longer be as serious about discerning a biblical Word for our lives when we gather for worship as were our forefathers who were unashamed "biblicists." For them the Bible was really present while for some modern congregations it seems to be optional.

This direction, too then, can be a distortion of the hermeneutics of the pulpit in our congregations through which the biblical Word, though not completely silenced, virtually ceases to be proclaimed or heard as such.

3. The Problem of Dichotomizing. A third major problem I would identify is closely related to the preceding, namely the dichotomizing of biblical theology and Christian ethics. While we have been warned about this as a danger and as a distortion of faithful biblical hermeneutics, it appears to be an ever-present temptation.

In a recent series of studies on Ephesians, I made a special presentation on how Ephesians 2 speaks in vs. 1-10 of "The New Person in Christ" and in vs. 11-22 of "The New Community in Christ." I noted that this may represent two polarities of concern in our congregations. I spoke of how we tend to choose up

sides in the matter, deciding which part of Ephesians we want to emphasize. On the one hand we may champion a strong doctrine of sin, a great doctrine of grace, and a proclamation that we are saved by grace through faith, usually applying this to ourselves as individual persons. On the other hand we may champion the tragedy of human estrangement, the need for reconciliation, and the glory and joy of the new community in Christ who is our peace. The result is a dichotomy in our thinking and a polarization in our congregations.

My appeal is to read biblical materials in their wholeness, to see how kerygma and didache are inextricably intertwined, how the gospel applies to the person and also to the community. Strange as it may seem to us, an amazing number of persons said they had never seen Bible reading and Bible study in that way before. It is possible that they had been told this many times, but had not really grasped the concept of the wholeness of the biblical materials.

IV. SOME POSSIBLE CONSTRUCTIVE STEPS

Having identified some of the practical problems for hermeneutics in helping to renew and reshape pulpit ministries, I conclude with a few suggestions which I trust may bring to mind still others.

1. Collegial Concern about Preaching. The basic constructive impact on the pulpit ministries in Mennonite congregations should be coming from our teaching of biblical/theological/ and ethical studies in our college and seminary classrooms. Normally there should be a discernible relationship between what is taught in these classes and what is preached from the pulpits, an assumption which I as a "teacher of preaching" no longer take for granted. I am grateful for colleagues in theological faculties who indicate to me that they encourage their students to develop special study projects in which biblical materials are prepared for teaching and preaching ministries in the congregations. In this area even closer partnership among those of us who have hermeneutical concerns needs to be developed. In this way the "teaching of preaching" becomes the concern of an entire faculty and not only the speciality of a person or a small group of persons.

2. Developing a Dialogical Approach. To develop this kind of preaching, it is time to abandon the monological concept and move into a dialogical

concept of the relation between the "pulpit and the pew." Some of us are working on this vigorously by changing our methodology in the teaching of preaching to a program in which we supervise students in their ministry of preaching rather than having them hear lectures on preaching, read books about preaching, or make sermon outlines on biblical passages. These students preach to congregations but as part of the process they must carry on dialogue about their preaching before they deliver their "sermon," and afterward must learn to listen to representative members of the congregation give honest and concerned "feedback" to help the student recognize what has been heard. This is only the beginning of dialogue but it can be an important step.

In the process of what happens even during a short semester, it is striking to observe the growth of awareness about what goes on in the preaching process, how "seminary concepts and vocabulary" are not always understood correctly in the congregations, and how the preacher has to begin to listen to the "sermon-listeners" as well as to the seminary professors and the learned commentaries.

3. Longer-Range Planning of Preaching. It could also be helpful to give more attention to the longer-range planning of preaching, giving attention to continuity, appropriate sequence, and an over-all movement toward considered and articulated goals. Some who emphasize the immediacy of Holy Spirit guidance may resist this emphasis on planning, but why do we limit the guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit to the immediate situation?

One common form of "planned preaching" which I still find challenging and appreciated is to use Bible "books" as the basis for a series of messages, a method long appreciated, once very common, but now apparently appreciated even more because it is not so often used.

4. Holistic Congregational Curriculum. A fourth suggestion comes from Gerald Studer, a pastor and writer, who in a recent vigorous dialogue on the renewal of preaching shared how useful he had found the pattern of relating his preaching directly to the Christian Education curriculum used in his congregation. Rather than finding himself "in competition" with his church school leaders, he entered into a "team relationship" with them and coordinated his own preaching plans with the purposes and objectives of the church's educational program.

This proved to be a giant step forward in the unification of congregational goals and ministries and deserves serious attention elsewhere.

5. Institutional Teachers in the Congregations. A fifth suggestion which has come repeatedly is that college and seminary teachers, in whatever discipline they serve, should frequently also be involved in preaching and other congregational ministries. This likely happens in most of our schools. However, the proposal persists that more of us should spend "sabbatical study time" in congregational settings. We are told that congregations would be willing to let us concentrate on our on-going studies but they would like to hear us on Sundays and otherwise in their pulpits sharing with them and their pastors how we are reading the Scriptures and what they are saying to us about God's will for our time. Is it possible that a kind of "professionalism" in our roles as college and seminary teachers keeps us from heeding this call to our congregations?

6. The Work of the Holy Spirit. Finally, however, our hermeneutical concerns will find embodiment in renewed pulpit ministries only as the work of God's Holy Spirit is recognized and becomes more operative among us and in our congregations. The concluding lines of James Smart in The Interpretation of Scripture (Westminster, 1961) are still appropriate. Having spoken of how finally the true interpretation of Scripture is not the product of painstaking processes and skills alone, he says,

So also today when we fail to understand Scripture, not just in the Christian congregation but also in our Christian scholarship, the difficulty may not be in our hermeneutics but in ourselves, that like our predecessors in Israel we are not unconditionally open toward a God who kills in order to make alive and who roots up what we have planted and tears down what we have built, theologically as well as practically, in order that he may clear the ground for a planting and building of his own (p. 397, underlining mine).

This is the mystery and the challenge, at once the frustration and the glory, of both hermeneutics and the preaching ministry.

AFTERWORD

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN ANABAPTIST-MENNONITE INTERPRETATION

Willard Swartley

The first two essays implied that the methods of biblical interpretation used today differ substantially from those of sixteenth century Anabaptism. This Afterword will assess this assumption and seek to identify points of continuity as well.

Significant Changes

1. A most striking difference between sixteenth century Anabaptist and current Mennonite hermeneutic is the context and consequent function of each. The Anabaptists shared with the other Reformers a strong desire to free interpretation from tradition. In subsequent years the liberation of Scripture from tradition became chaotically complete, exalting itself amid historical probabilities and rational necessity. Now the pendulum swings toward increasing readiness to acknowledge that interpretation should be held accountable to faith, both confessionally and traditionally. This does not mean forfeiting the gains of the Reformation, but a candid acknowledgment that a Reformation 450 years old, even though it affirms semper reformanda, will necessarily appeal to its own history and tradition.

2. Standing between then and now, the Enlightenment continues to influence most current Mennonite use of the Bible. While rejecting rationalism that judges biblical historical claims by general human experience and methodological skepticism, Mennonite interpretation employs reason as a means to make sense out of the language, history and moral imperative of Scripture. Perry Yoder's From Word to Life demonstrates this point systematically, suggesting that the method described here in Brunk's essay may be utilized fruitfully, but apart from rationalistic assumptions.

But surely the difference is a matter of degree and context. For the Reformers were much influenced by the Renaissance and the European universities, which also began in the twelfth century and vigorously developed during the next several centuries. Even Luther's sola Scriptura did not stand alone; reason

played an important role--in the study of the original biblical languages, in theological formulation and in the interconfessional debates. The invention of the printing press and consequent rising literacy, both the fruit of reason, were also significant catalysts in the Reformation's hermeneutic.

Hence what appears first as difference bears similarities as well. The real difference, it seems to me, lies in the fact that we now live with both the figs and the thorns of five centuries of reason's work. Using Bernhard Anderson's figure of speech, much has gone over the dam--and more should, but the commitment to a reasonable method continues. Hence method as such plays a more major role in current biblical interpretation than it did in Anabaptist hermeneutics (although Marpeck seems to have thought much about this).

3. As Kraus' article demonstrates, Mennonites today have been influenced by fundamentalist views of the Bible and consequent methods of using the Bible. No such contextual analogy can be found for sixteenth century Anabaptism. While in the sixteenth century the Bible was used to argue a variety of doctrinal points, a doctrine of the Bible itself, i.e., its inspiration and inerrancy, was not the object of argument. This means, among other things, that we today spend a disproportionate share of time debating about the Bible itself rather than appealing to it to address the kinds of issues the Anabaptists initiated: believers' baptism, nature of the church, discipleship, the church's freedom from the powers, witness to government, congregational discipline, non-participation in war, etc.

This shift, when wedded with the concern for method noted above, raises sobering issues for us as biblical scholars and for the church as a whole: to which causes go the balance of our energies and time?

4. Although it is difficult for us to own, Mennonite biblical interpretation is more separated from practical life concerns than was Anabaptist interpretation. While we speak of the unity of knowledge and obedience, our situation in life does not require us to pay the cost; we do not suffer for our beliefs as did the Anabaptists. Hence while we espouse discipleship and obedience as important hermeneutical perspectives, even epistemological factors, our actual life-experiences participate in the luxuries of those physically secure and economically well maintained. We do not experience

"the hermeneutical privilege of the poor," even though many of us identify to varying degrees with that perspective and cause. Hence in our more honest moments we must confess that our relationship to Anabaptist hermeneutics is that of "looking on from afar." And the distance is greatest, in my judgment, in our drift away from strong communal ties of mutual support, economically and ethically. The individualism of the Enlightenment has taken its toll upon us, and struck at a most vulnerable point, our continuity with the faith experience of the Anabaptists.

Significant Continuities

1. We continue "looking on." Though we do not suffer persecution for our faith in North America, we do sometimes--even corporately--take unpopular stands which in principle commit us to walking the literal way of the cross and tasting the "bitter Christ," about which the Anabaptists knew much--in joy. Our efforts to refuse participation in war and to support those who take more radical stands on nonregistration and refusal to pay taxes used for war fall within this stream of continuity. Certainly also our mission, service and relief endeavors, when they are undertaken in the spirit of humility, reflect continuity with the hermeneutic of obedience.

With these strands of continuity to the Anabaptist hermeneutic of practical obedience, we face today a major challenge from liberation hermeneutics.¹ While Mennonite theology would need to criticize liberation theology--especially in the area of ecclesiology, we are confronted from both our own history and from liberation hermeneutics by questions arising from the "politics of understanding" and the "light of praxis." That Anabaptism was often identified with the forces of revolution in the sixteenth century is no accident; nor is it accidental that Mennonites serving God's kingdom around the world develop sympathies for revolutionary forces who promise hope for the poor. To interpret the Bible from "the underside of history" as we listen to intracanonial dialogue and critique is a point of continuity with the tradition which gave us birth.

2. A related aspect of continuity with the Anabaptist hermeneutic has been the emphasis upon "homing" biblical interpretation in the community of faith, specifically in congregations, among the members of the church. While Yoder described this experience as distinctive to Anabaptism, Lind and Bender emphasized its cruciality for today: Lind by

affirming the community of faith as the context in which the principle of analogy is applied and Bender by calling for the discernment of biblical teaching and its application in the congregation, even the weekly Sunday school class. This means that the biblical scholar plays only a catalytic function: s/he sets the stage for the community of faith to discern the truth--what God's word means for us today.

For our contemporary setting, this means also that the church, and not the university, is the clue-generating community for biblical interpretation, at least for the discerning phase and for the testing of the compatibility of various methods and insights with the structures of belief and behavior in the faith community. This may produce a certain tension, a creative tension, for biblical scholars.

Further, this emphasis repudiates any model of "private interpretation" in which the intellect or convictions of one person control the minds of the members. Both in Anabaptism and in Mennonite hermeneutical efforts today, Paul's teaching that the church be edified by the use of many gifts functions as a goal for healthy congregational life and spiritual vitality.

3. A very basic, but possibly overlooked, point of continuity lies in the general agreement, then and now, that interpretation should grasp the plain sense of the text, the historically intended meaning. While this commitment in the sixteenth century meant reducing allegorical, moral, and tropological interpretations to a secondary status, it means for us balking at structuralist directions which emphasize multivalent meanings and dogmatic schemes which make Scripture support systems of thought, be these dispensationalism, modern egalitarian rights platforms, or materialist ideologies. Conversely, it means that we do assess the influences upon the interpreter, especially the social world of the interpreter, to enable us to distinguish between what we want to hear in the text and what the text in its historical (literal) sense wants to speak to us.

General Observations

1. Recent trends in biblical interpretation, those outlined above in the second half of my essay, make continuity between current Mennonite biblical scholarship and Anabaptist hermeneutics relatively compatible, especially when compared with either the earlier rationalist, objectivist agenda or the more recent existentialist agenda. Trends toward

theological accountability and communal discernment fit well with Anabaptist emphases; the following plea from George T. Montague to the Catholic Biblical Association would readily receive applause from most Mennonite biblical scholars:

We have a "problem" of private interpretation because we see hermeneutics as a primarily individualistic activity. Under the impact of the dominant liberal ideology of Western society, the insistence of the reformers on the freedom of conscience of the interpreter has led to a view of hermeneutics in which an interpretation is a matter of opinion of the individual and in which one opinion is as good as another.

Against this we need to insist that interpretation is not a matter of "opinion" but of praxis. Interpretation does not end when we draw the "moral" of a text, but when we act upon it. Secondly, the praxis which is the end of interpretation is not individual but corporate. In the last analysis, it is the involvement of the interpreter in a community of interpretation, in a community of praxis,² which makes interpretation a meaningful activity.

Further, the call to hear the text as it is--from current literary concerns--makes the most important aspect of interpretation, listening to the text, the mutual privilege of congregation and scholar. Both start at the same place; specialized learnings are introduced at appropriate places to illumine the text. But the text remains central.

2. Within the current hermeneutical directions, Anabaptist-Mennonite contributions can play a significant role. Espousing the concerns for personal and social transformation (Wink), informing action (praxis) by the light of the Word (liberation hermeneutic), and seeing reconciliation as the unifying emphasis of the New Testament (Stuhlmacher), Anabaptist-Mennonites are faced with the opportunity and challenge to contribute examples and larger programs of biblical interpretation that show the epistemological and validating significance of love, obedience and shalom-justice, corporately conceived and lived.

1. See especially Laverne Rutschman, "Anabaptism and Liberation Theology," MQR 55(July 1981), 260-61.

2. George T. Montague. "Hermeneutics and the Teaching of Scripture," CBQ 41(Jan 1979), p. 12. Montague cites this from David Lochhead, "Hermeneutics and Ideology," The Ecumenist 15(1977), 83-84.

Some of the papers--mostly unpublished--in the following Bibliography were presented at one of several consultations on biblical hermeneutics; these consultations were sponsored by/for Mennonite college Bible faculties, seminary Bible faculties, or alumni or several groups together. Since the historical record of these endeavors contributes to our self-understanding, I have listed these consultations in chronological order; the numbers at the end indicate which papers in the Bibliography were presented on that occasion. The abbreviation-code for each consultation/workshop on the left is used in the Bibliography to indicate the occasion when the paper was presented. Articles which appear in this volume are designated [Essays BI] at the end of the entry.

- BeC 1964 Menno Simons Lectures on "Anabaptist Interpretation of Scripture," delivered at Bethel College, October 25-28, 1964. Nos. 6,7,9,12,17,19.
- GBSA 1966 Goshen College Biblical Seminary Regional Alumni Meeting at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, March 29, 1966. Nos. 24,26.
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